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WHEN I WAS A BOY IN IRELAND

BLARNEY CASTLE

WHEN I WAS A BOY IN IRELAND

ALAN M. BUCK

New York
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TO

Henry Kellett Chambers

and

Maria Cristina Chambers

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When I Was a Boy in Ireland

CHAPTER ONE

THOSE EARLY YEARS

I WAS born in Ireland on my parents' farm, one mile distant from the town of Tramore; Tramore, in turn, being seven miles distant from the city of Waterford, in the southern province of Munster.

At an early age, I learned from my father who spoke Gaelic, that Tramore was so called because of the long stretch of smooth, golden sand lying between the two promontories of Tramore Bay, the name being a corruption of the Gaelic words, *Triag mor,* which means Big Strand.

It is with the Big Strand that I associate some of my happiest boyhood memories. Mother, Father, my brother Bobby, and I loved to walk on the Strand. Sometimes, we went as far as the Rabbit Burrow, a group of sand dunes overrun with rabbits over whose destiny, Gullamugus, the terrible gnome on horseback is said to preside. It is because of fear of Gullamugus that the people of Tramore will not kill or eat a Burrow rabbit: "Once upon a time," they will tell you, "a man killed and ate a Burrow rabbit and he was not seen ever afterwards because Gullamugus, riding a powerful white stallion, caught up with him and took him prisoner."

Our way to the Rabbit Burrow lay by the Women's and Men's bathing slips.

Bobby and I thought they were called slips because people were forever slipping on the slimy, green seaweed clinging to their already barnacle-encrusted cement

floors. Mother corrected our wrong impression one day, however, telling us a slip was another name for a dock.

Both slips, as I remember them, were lined with heavy, wooden bathing boxes on wheels. When the tide ebbed, the boxes were wheeled from their slips across the sand to the water's edge for the convenience of bathers.

An imaginary boundary line divided the two slips, since mixed bathing was not permitted. I recall listening once to a woman in charge of the Women's Bathing Slip berating a man who swam across the boundary line into "female waters." She was quite beside herself at the enormity of his offense and called him a blackguard and other names and threatened to set the peelers, as our police were then called, after him.

It was this same woman who, when Bobby and I, being very little, went bathing with Mother from the Women's

Slip, used to tell us she had just poured a kettle of hot water into the sea to make it warm for us.

Usually, on Sunday afternoons, we went driving in a pony and trap. Our favorite drive was to the Metal Man. We would start out after two o'clock dinner and while the pony jogged along at a slow trot, amuse ourselves noting the changes wrought by the passing seasons in our favorite "beauty spots." One of these "beauty spots" I remember particularly well. We named it, appropriately enough, "the Nest," for in summer it resembled a gigantic bird's nest woven of sweetly perfumed, yellow flowering, prickly green furze bush. It had grown naturally into this formation on the summit of a grass-covered bank hardby a gravelled road that wandered casually along the edge of a red clay cliff to the Metal Man.

On one such drive, Father left us at the Metal Man while he drove to the nearby village of Fenner to inspect a horse he wished to buy.

The occasion lingers in my mind because it was on that day I first became conscious of my mother's beauty and, becoming conscious of it, I also was frightened by it; frightened in the sense of being filled with a reverential awe.

She looked like a mermaid sitting there on the grass with my brother and me. She had taken off her hat and let down her waist-length ebon hair that it might become friendly with the sea breeze. Her eyelashes curled out from and above her half closed, brown eyes and a calm restful smile lingered on her full red lips as she listened to our childish prattle.

The Metal Man, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean from the tip of a rocky promontory, is as the name suggests, the

figure of a man cast in metal. His iron clothes proclaim him a mariner. Atop a whitewashed stone pillar he stands, his right arm pointing out to sea, warning passing ships of the dangerous rocks beneath him.

On dark and stormy nights when harassed sailors are unable to see him over the foaming crests of mountainous, angrily see-sawing waves, the Metal Man, it is believed, recites a little rhyme in loud and sonorous tones that the sailors may hear him. Mother taught us the rhyme that afternoon when Father was in Fenner. I have never forgotten it. It is—

> Keep out, keep out from me.
> I am the rocks of Misery!

Many times, when visiting the Metal Man, we beheld the unusual sight of numerous young ladies busily hopping 'round the pillar on which the Metal Man stands.

IRON MEN

THE "MEN'S" BATHING PLACE

At first, Bobby and I were vastly amused, believing them to be playing a variation of the game of "Beddies," as hop-scotch is called in Tramore. But when Father explained their real purpose, we tempered our amusement with the desire that they might be successful in their endeavor.

"If the young ladies can hop around the pillar three times without letting their lifted foot touch ground, the Metal Man guarantees they will be married within a twelvemonth," Father told us.

It is a difficult feat to accomplish. The pillar has a wide circumference and, the hopeful young ladies will tell you, it grows each time you round it. Also, at the base of the pillar, sharp stones were strewn. How they got there was considered something of a mystery, although Father claimed to have solved the mystery by taking Mike Dermody, a local cobbler who profited greatly by repairing the

young ladies' lacerated shoes, into consideration.

I remember a neighbor of ours who married a girl who had made the grade in the matter of hopping 'round the Metal Man. The girl, it seems, was possessed of a lashing tongue, a fact she concealed from her bridegroom until the honeymoon was over. The disillusioned bridegroom was heard to complain bitterly to Paddy Reilly, our stable boy, and his complaints were directed not against his bride but against the Metal Man.

"Paddy me boy," said he, "will you be after telling me what we do be doing with a Metal Man when with one arm he pushes man out of danger and with the other he pushes him into it?"

"I take it, Tommy darlint, you're meanin' the holy sacrament of Matrimony," Paddy made answer.

"I am that, Paddy. May the devil run away with the Metal Man this very night," Tommy shamelessly decried.

There are two odors associated with my childhood, either of which is capable of carrying me back to my native land. I have named them my magic carpets.

The first of these odors is that of burning turf, an odor I came to love sitting by the open hearth in our roomy, red-flagged kitchen. It has a suggestion of the odor of burning leaves, but is a heavy, more penetrating odor. It passes beyond the nostrils into the brain and lingers there, druglike. I believe this odor to be responsible in part, for my leaning towards things beyond the Veil, things not of this world; fairies and the like.

A ghost story told while sitting 'round a turf fire is something more than a mere story. The ghost joins the company. His presence can be felt. Occasionally, a listener will make the Sign of the Cross and huddle closer to his neighbor. When he does, you may be quite sure, he has felt a supernatural being hover over him.

Yes, there is something eerie about the

odor of burning turf and something wild and untamable too, a something which is so closely allied with the Irish nature as to be almost part of it!

The other odor, while less spiritual in its effect is, to me, as disturbing. Looking back, it seems I was born into this odor, the odor of horse. Talcum powder was useless against its strength, scented bath soap quailed and dissolved in its presence and sensitive people buried their noses in handkerchiefs at its approach. I have since come to look upon the odor as a sort of natural inheritance from my mother who loved horses and from my father who when he was a boy ran away from home to be a jockey. So well did he succeed that when Boss Croker, the American politician settled in Ireland, my father was his leading jockey, riding such great a horse as Orby to victory in the Liverpool cup in England, for his employer. Later Orby won the English Derby and it

nearly broke my father's heart that Boss Croker instead of giving him the mount, sent him to ride in America.

Truly, the odor of horse was instilled in my blood! I remember being in church one Sunday morning with Mother, Father and Bobby, all of us dressed in our Sunday best, and hearing an elderly lady in an adjoining pew sniff disdainfully and remark audibly to our great embarrassment: "Sure they might as well have come on horseback, wearing breeches and leggings."

The riding of a horse, however, remains and always will remain one of my painful boyhood memories.

I was five years of age. Father had recently bought a highly bred chestnut hunter whose tremendous strength, great staying powers and jumping ability were obvious at a glance. So enthusiastic did I become about this horse that I was filled with an uncontrollable desire to ride him.

But father refused my request, saying such a horse was a man's horse, that he would without doubt pull my puny arms from their sockets. Unconvinced, I sought out Paddy Reilly whose duties included grooming the horse.

"Faith," Paddy protested, "you might as well think of riding the devil and he not wanting you on him, as riding that beast."

"I wouldn't mind riding the devil if only he had four legs which he hasn't," I boldly replied.

Coming from one so young, this remark amused Paddy and won him to my cause. After laughing heartily, he agreed to grant my wish, making me promise, however, not to take the horse outside the yard gates.

I broke my promise the moment Paddy's back was turned and calmly piloted my mount out onto the drive and into the three acre field fronting the house. There

I prodded him to action with heels scarcely reaching his sides. Alas, I got more action than I bargained for, for the horse broke into a brisk canter and coming to the stone wall bounding the field took it in his stride, leaving himself on one side, me on the other.

Several days later, limping and ill at ease, I again approached the stables. What Paddy would say was my chief concern. I came on him, sitting on a three legged milking stool in the cow house, whittling and whistling at one and the same time: "That was a bad fall you took, alanna!" he greeted me.

"It was all of that, Paddy," I nervously agreed.

"Puts me in mind of a fall I took meself a couple of years back," Paddy ruminated, looking me straight in the eye.

"Tell me about it," I prompted, seeking salve for my wounded pride.

"This was the way of it," he complied.

"I was working for Jack Murphy of Dunmore at the time and nothing would do Jack but to enter a horse of his in a little bit of a race meeting down Ballyhack way in the county Wexford. When we got there, what do ye think happened, alanna?"

"Jack Murphy let you ride his horse instead of riding it himself," I guessed.

"Jack Murphy do the like of that! Divil the bit of him! Jack wouldn't let the Archbishop himself throw leg across the critter."

"Well, what then, Paddy?"

"They made me start the races, that's what they did and let you listen to what happened. First off, they put me up on a scrawny looking nag to ride to the starting post. To look at him, you would not say he had the breath of life in him. But he had. Faith and indeed he had! When I dropped my cap by way of starting the first race, off he raced after the rest of

the horses and he not knowing any better, and a full four furlongs he went with them before the excitement got the better of him and he flew the course, rolling over and over like a sack of 'spuds' for all the world, and me under him the while. Now, what do you think of that, you who would be riding the devil himself had he four legs, no less?"

"Aw, I think you are only telling me that for the cod," I said, knowing he was trying to set me at ease with him and knowing too, full well, the horse had yet to be foaled to throw the same Paddy Reilly.

CHAPTER TWO

SCHOOL AND PLAY

One morning, Mother and I walked with Bobby to the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy where he was to attend school.

The Sister who received us asked if I, too, would like to go to school.

"Yes, indeed, Sister!" I answered, being tormented with jealousy at the thought of Bobby doing something I could not share in doing. Mother intervened, however, pronouncing me too young.

"I only suggested it because I thought he might be lonely at home without his brother," the Sister apologetically explained.

"I would be terribly lonely, Mother," I wailed, forgetting, for the moment, that

Bobby and I, at home, were as a pair of fighting cocks.

"Very well then," Mother relented. "You may stay but don't come running to me tomorrow saying you don't want to go to school."

So, it was, that Bobby and I began going to school together.

Miss Rodgers, our first teacher, was a jolly person with grey hair parted in the center and a rose-pink complexion that turned purple when she became angry.

I remember her giving us little tin trays filled with sand in which we learned to write the letters of the alphabet. Later, when we had mastered the alphabet, we were given slates and slate pencils that made a screeching noise when pressed upon too heavily.

We carried our lunch to school with us and at noon, after we had eaten, we played games in the stonewalled yard back of the classrooms. One of the games we played

was called, Here We Come Gathering Nuts in May, and it had a little song that went with it and was sung as two rows of boys and girls danced towards each other, changing positions when they came together. Here it is—

Here we come gathering nuts in May.
Here we come gathering nuts in May.
Here we come gathering nuts in May,
On a cold and frosty morning.

It does not sound very exciting, does it? But it used to afford us a great deal of amusement. Perhaps I have forgotten part of it. I wonder!

One day while I was eating my lunch, a pretty little girl came up to me and asked me this riddle—

Pinchme and Punchme went out to swim.
Pinchme was drowned. Who came in?

"Punchme, of course," I answered immediately.

"Sure, I will," responded the little girl, administering a telling punch.

Had Punchme drowned, I suppose she would have pinched me. There was no escape.

This very same little girl was often called upon in singing class to sing with me a duet called, "Where Are You Going to My Pretty Maid?" For the life of me I cannot recall the music to which it was sung, but I remember the words; the very simple words:

"Where are you going to, my pretty maid?
"Where are you going to, my pretty maid?"
"I'm goin' a milkin', Sir," she said.
"Sir," she said. "Sir," she said.
"I'm goin' a milkin', Sir," she said.

"May I go with you, my pretty maid?
"May I go with you, my pretty maid?"
"You're kindly welcome, Sir," she said.
"Sir," she said. "Sir," she said.
"You're kindly welcome, Sir," she said.

"What is your fortune, my pretty maid?
"What is your fortune, my pretty maid?"
"My face is my fortune, Sir," she said.
"Sir," she said. "Sir," she said.
"My face is my fortune, Sir," she said.

"Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid.
"Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid."
"Nobody asked you, Sir," she said.
"Sir," she said. "Sir," she said.
"Nobody asked you, Sir," she said.

"Why do the Sisters close the altars when an inspector comes to our school, Mother?" I asked, on my return home, one afternoon, having seen the altars shuttered from sight that day.

"The British Government governs the convents of Ireland and will not allow them to have altars in the classrooms," Mother explained, a trace of resentment in her usually placid voice.

"Is that why we have to sing, *God Save the King,* too, Mother?"

"That is why, little man."

"And is that why, when an inspector comes, the picture of the King and Queen is turned from the wall so that we can see it, Mother?"

"Do they really do that?" Mother asked, her eyes welling with laughter.

"Yes, indeed they do and there are always cobwebs on the King and Queen when they are turned around."

"Cobwebs on the King and Queen!" Mother's tinkling little laugh ran out, making me laugh too although I was not quite sure why I laughed.

Father came into the room at that moment and Mother repeated what I had told her. Oh, how Father laughed his funniest laugh! Then, catching me up in his strong arms, he tossed me into the air, crying out: "We'll make a good Irishman out of you—a rebel, no less!"

While at Convent school, I became friendly with my deskmate, Mickey

O'Brien. Mickey was a very good-looking little boy. He had black curly hair that danced jigs on his forehead, Irish blue eyes that were mirrors of innocence and a way of carrying himself that reminded one of winged cherubs around the throne of God. Thank Heaven, he belied his looks! He was a daredevil among daredevils. His elastic catapult with which he shot paper bullets with unerring aim, was the dread of those unfortunate enough to be seated within a hundred yards of him; while his knowledge of birds made him a veritable king of boys in the town of Tramore.

Mickey often invited me to his house for dinner and I never turned down an invitation because the meals served there were among the finest I have ever eaten. His mother, besides being an excellent cook, was of good heart and cheerful disposition. She always made me feel at home with her. I have heard Mickey say

of her: "When God made my mother, He didn't spare the sugar, for she's the sweetest woman in all Ireland!"

Mickey's father was a jarveyman, the name given in Ireland to men who drive jaunting cars for a living. He owned the best horse between shafts and the neatest jaunting car in Tramore. The car was painted all over yellow, having red plush cushions on its narrow side seats and on the little throne, or driver's seat above the side seats in the center of the car.

When he drove, Mr. O'Brien carried a long whip which Mickey respected with an almost holy respect. "Bring me the whip," his father would say when Mickey was bold. Those words were sufficient to put Mickey on his good behavior for a week. To the best of my knowledge, the whip was never used except to flick flies from the horse's back in summertime; Mr. O'Brien being an exceptionally kind and reserved man.

On one momentous occasion, Mickey took me on one of his bird studying trips. Shall I ever forget that day! Shall I ever forget the look of terrible surprise on my dear mother's face when I returned home, my clothes in tatters, my face, hands and knees scratched and stained with blood, and my hair all entangled with briars. Studying the habits of birds with Mickey O'Brien certainly was an adventure!

We started out, Mickey and I, early one Saturday morning and walked along the old Waterford road—at one time the only road between Waterford and Tramore—past the rows of whitewashed cottages with their earthen floors and half doors, on by the race course and golf links to the Metal Bridge, over which the train passed a dozen or more times every day.

At the Metal Bridge we cut across a ploughed field to a rookery where the rooks, seeing us from a distance, set up a

mournful cawing and started to leave their nests.

When we came close to the trees of the rookery, I saw they were straight and unclimbable as telegraph poles:

"Mickey," I ventured, "you'll never be able to climb to see inside the nests."

"Sure I will," boasted the youthful wizard and envy of my heart. "I'll shin up. It's easy when you have the know how."

Certainly it looked easy the way he went about it, hand over hand, leg over leg, until he reached the topmost branches. From my lowly position on *terra firma,* I watched him pull out his little notebook and pencil and begin to make notes of what he saw inside the nests. Then carefully, ever so carefully, he repocketed his notebook and descended to ground.

Beside me once more, magnificently unconcerned by his success, Mickey told me what he had seen. For the most part the

twig crossed nests were empty. But in two of them he had seen eggs, greenish grey eggs spotted brown, as big as pigeons' eggs but more pointed at one end.

"Sometimes," Mickey revealed, "I come across bits of tin, old broken mirrors, knives and all sorts of shiny things in their nests. They are the terrible thieves, you know!" I did not know but I just nodded my head as if I did, taking in at the same time all that he told me.

From the rookery, we set off to find a robin's nest, Mickey being anxious to learn what materials they used in building.

After a terrific search we found one in the branches of a hawthorn tree.

The tiny mother robin, a pocket edition of her cousin, the American robin, flew from her nest, frightened by our noise.

What a cozy little home she had in comparison to the dirty, cawing rooks! Made with wisps of hay and golden yellow straw, and lined with chestnut, grey and

black horsehair on which sat four light blue eggs marked with reddish spots, it presented a delightful contrast to the heavily scented, livid pink blossoms of the hawthorn tree. And all the while I stared amazed, Mickey was busily writing down the things I stared at.

"Did you ever hear tell how the robin came by his red breast?" he asked me, when he had finished writing.

"No, Mickey, I never did," I admitted.

"Well, this was the way of it: when our Lord Jesus was on the road to Calvary, bowed down by the weight of His cross and bleeding from his thorn-pierced head, a wee robin in his standing on a bush by the wayside, saw Him, and like you or me would be, the robin was sorry at what he saw. Thought he to himself, it is a woeful thing I do be seeing before my eyes, a woeful thing entirely. Surely I can do something to put a stop to it! Forthwith he flew to Jesus and with his bill

began to pull the thorns from His head. But a divil of a soldier saw him and frightened him away.

"When the robin got home later in the day, his *wifeen,* Mrs. Robin, said to him, 'Is it a stain I do be seeing on your vest, husband mine?'

"The robin looked down and sure enough there was a deep red stain. 'Faith and indeed it is nothing else,' the robin admitted. 'It must be the blood of Him from whose head I pulled thorns with my bill.' And he told his *wifeen* all that had happened and she forgave him the stain. Between you and me, Al, I kind of think she thought it elegant and very becoming to him! And ever since that day robins have had red breasts. That's my story."

"And a fine story too!" said I.

Almost immediately, Mickey found a wren's nest in a cluster of furze, overhanging a muddy watered brook. Not until he pointed a circular opening in the

seemingly rumpled ball of emerald moss, did I really believe it was a nest. The little brown mother wren, her usually saucy, cocked up tail tilted at an angry angle, hovered over us while we explored her domed and wondrous home. Imagine our surprise and delight when we saw as many as fifteen yellow spotted white eggs nestling in its cozy feathered lining!

"This for sure is the reason the wren is called the king of all birds!" I exclaimed, never before having seen so many eggs together in a nest.

"Faith, it's not the reason," Mickey flatly contradicted.

"Well, if you're so smart, what is the reason?" said I, mad at myself for knowing nothing.

"Is it standing there with your two big feet on the ground trying to tell me you don't know, you are?"

"Yes, Mickey," I confessed humbly, ashamed of my anger.

"Sure I thought everyone knew the story," said Mickey calmly. "Let you sit down here on the grass beside me and we'll rest our legs while I enlighten your ignorance."

When we were seated, he commenced.

"A long time ago, all the birds from all over the world came to Ireland to find out which of them could fly the highest. They met right here in Tramore and at the signal of the curlew's cry off they flew into the sky, hiding the sun from sight so many of them they were.

"It wasn't long, however, before they started to flutter back to earth, tired out and breathing hard. After a while it looked as if the eagle was the only one left aloft. More than a mile up and as proud of himself as any peacock, he was.

"Didn't he get the surprise of his life though when, all of a sudden, he heard a burst of song above him!

" 'Begor,' said he to himself, 'I'm up

so high, it's the birds of Heaven I do be hearing.'

"But, *whisht,* there was the song again, close to his ear, he thought.

"'By the tail of me ancestor, I'm licked,' said he, turning the sharp eye of him over his left wing and seeing perched on his back, as smart as you please, a wee bit of a wren.

"When he came to ground, the other birds put their laugh on him, saying the wren was their king. Sure enough, he was and sure enough, he still is and if you don't believe me, you can ask my mother."

"Sure I believe you, Mickey. Sure, I do."

As we continued on our way, prying into bushes, brambles and hedges, I was thinking how strange it was the wren should be so famous.

On Saint Stephen's day, all over Ireland, this tiny bird is honored.

Well do I remember Father giving us pennies to give to the wren boys on that day.

The wren boys went from house to house in pairs, each one carrying a beribboned furze bush hung with pasteboard images of the wren. They would come to the front door and knock very hard with the knocker to make certain of an audience before singing the wren song which, I am at a loss to explain why, has some very cruel lines, lines that are as untruthful as they are cruel, for no Irish boy would lay finger to a wren. The words of the wren song vary in different parts of Ireland. It is the Waterford version, as sung in front of our house during my boyhood, that I quote here:

The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
On Saint Stephen's day was caught in the furze.
I up with my wattle and knocked him down,
And brought him into Tramore town.

Now, Mr. Buck is a wealthy man,
So, to his house we brought the wren.
Pockets of money and barrels of beer,
We wish you all, a Happy New Year!

Up with the kettle and down with the pan,
Give us some pence and let us be gone!

At the conclusion of the wren song, Bobby and I took great delight in opening the door and distributing our pennies, receiving, in turn for our generosity, God's blessing on ourselves and on our home before the wren boys departed elsewhere.

Mickey and I found one other nest that day, a swallow's nest cleverly cemented with mud to a rafter in a broken down outhouse on a deserted farm. Two eggs were in the nest, freckled white eggs. Mickey took particulars of them and of the nest while I picked thorns from my legs and hands. Then when we were both ready, we started our long walk home in the evening twilight.

When at last we came to my house, we saw the cows ambling contentedly into their stalls, Paddy Reilly loitering behind them whistling the tune he was in the habit of whistling at milking time. "The Pretty Girl Milking the Cow," it was called, a tune said to have been composed by the fairy people or by a mortal musician the fairy people borrowed from his home and forgot to return.

Mickey stayed to dinner that evening and after Mother had recovered from the shock of our appearance, and we had eaten, we spent the happy two hours sitting 'round the turf fire, telling and grossly exaggerating our adventures, aided by Mickey's copious notes.

Soon after that day, it was, Bobby and I left the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy, being considered too old to remain in a school devoted principally to girls.

CHAPTER THREE

MOUNT SAINT BENEDICT

THE train guard, he of the blue uniform and silver buttons, blew his shrill whistle, the engine driver pulled a cord, releasing an impatient snort of steam, the wheels began to chug, chug and Bobby and I hung our heads out of a third class carriage window waving goodbye to Mother and Father who stood, bravely smiling, arm in arm, on the grey flagged platform of Waterford City station.

It was not until the train rounded its first turn and picked up speed that we burst into tears. When we crossed the iron, trellis bridge, high above the river Barrow, to Wexford, we were crying as if our hearts would break. At length, an

elderly man, the only other occupant of the carriage, intervened:

"What in Christmas ails ye?" he inquired in a gruff voice.

"We . . . we're going to boarding school," Bobby blubbered.

"We won't see our Mother and Father for three whole months," I sobbed.

"God bless my soul this day but ye're a fine pair of cry babies and no mistake. What do ye think your mother and father would say to your snivelling in a public conveyance? Answer me, will ye?"

A frightened silence was our answer.

"How old are ye?" The elderly man softened his voice.

"I'm nine," Bobby answered, and, nodding at me, added, "he's eight."

"My soul to the hawks if it isn't grown men ye are! Come over here and let me get a good look at ye."

We edged shyly towards the corner by a window where he sat.

"Listen to me well, the two of ye now," he counselled. "When I was your age, I was earning me own living away from home. Home, did I say? Heh, heheh, divil a much home I had! Didn't the bailiffs knock the old house from under us and pile it in the ditch when I was scarce out of me cradle! Do you know the work I was doing when I was nine? Tell me now, do ye?"

"No, sir."

"To be sure ye don't. How could ye when ye do nothing but snivel all the time? But I'll tell ye the work I was doing. I'll tell ye. Skinning cattle for John Carroll, the butcher, on O'Connell Street in Waterford City, is what I was doing."

"How do you skin cattle?" Bobby, his curiosity aroused, inquired.

"Do tell us," I added after catching a last, slow rolling tear from my cheek with my tongue.

"Bedad, if ye must know, ye must know

and there's nothing for it but to tell ye. Sit up here beside me," he invited, slapping the red plush seat beside him so hard that he caused a miniature dust storm.

Our journey from then on was of a pleasanter nature. Indeed, when we, at Gorey, said farewell to our new friend, we held an exalted opinion of cattle skinning, so entertaining had been his account of that profession.

Following a three mile drive from the station over hilly, sylvan edged roads, we arrived at our school, named Mount Saint Benedict, in honor of the patron saint of the Benedictine Order.

As we entered through the wrought iron gates and progressed the length of the slim, winding driveway, we were delighted with the pure, natural beauty of our surroundings. Stately old beech trees lined the drive, lending an air of dignity

and age to the vast estate set in a horse-shoe of woods. We caught brief glimpses of the playing fields, enough to recognize a cricket pitch, golf-links, rugby pitch, tennis and handball courts and a riding ring. As we drew near a group of ivy embraced buildings that we rightly judged to be school buildings, a flock of water hens rose crying into the air, betraying an island studded lake gleaming golden in the setting sun.

We were at once taken to the Dean who certainly did not add to the natural beauty by which he was surrounded, being an awkwardly tall man with cold, piercing eyes and crooked nose. When he spoke, his voice was the sound of waves beating on rocks. He quickly turned us over to Miss Keogh, the head matron, having first slapped our backs, however, and bellowed with laughter at our startled faces.

The head matron told us we were to live in the junior house, Saint Aidan's, and

took us there, leaving us with Miss McKenna, junior matron who bore a striking resemblance to a particularly cheerful robin I had once seen, so much so that I was always expecting her to chirp.

We were allotted beds and lockers in a large dormitory whose only other furniture was a long narrow table laden with enamelled basins and jugs.

Bobby and I were indignant on learning we had to wash in cold water the year 'round.

"Of course," Miss McKenna hastened to add, "you may take a bath twice a week and if you are early on the list of applicants you may get hot water then."

But we were never early on the list that first term. We were new boys. The worst and the last of everything was our unenviable lot.

With what horror too, we learned we had to retire at eight o'clock and rise at six o'clock! We wrote home immediately

complaining of such tyranny. Alas, Mother and Father seemed to have lost all heart and replied that we were to be good boys and do as we were told.

We soon became acquainted with our dormitory mates who, having learned our names, wished to know what our father was, how much money he had and if he owned and drove a motor car. We would, I suppose, have given ourselves great airs were it not that a Tramore boy was among those present. We had never met him before but we felt quite sure, knowing Tramore as we did, that he knew all about us. His name was Terence Smith and, having condescended to pinch me into wakefulness my first morning in chapel, I felt sure we were to be friends. The pinch was followed, after breakfast, with an invitation to join his gang, which I did blindly without inquiring whether he headed a band of would-be-murderers, thieves or political assassins.

Our classes commenced at nine o'clock each morning. Bobby and I were assigned to the third form where we found several of our room mates, among them Terence Smith. Our classroom boasted a large open fireplace in which, it being autumn, a wood fire blazed cheerfully. The teacher sat by the fire while we shivered in our desks. It was the knowing Terence who imparted, in rather a sibilant whisper, the knowledge that we had to gather the wood for the fire. I was aghast and openly rebellious but I was tamed—well tamed in time.

At twelve o'clock we broke for lunch and recreation, starting lessons again at four o'clock.

Every afternoon there was a list affixed to the bulletin board announcing the names of boys selected by the prefects to play rugby or cricket in season. One had no choice in the matter. If one's name appeared on the list one had to play or

report later in the day to the Dean who took down one's trousers and administered at least six strokes of a holly stick to the tenderest portion of the anatomy.

I learned, on that first afternoon, that one of the main objectives of Terence's gang was to steer clear of games. They were considered a great waste of time. It was much more profitable to rob one of the orchards or to light fires in the woods or, better still, to burn the camps of enemy gangs. These camps were usually made of the spreading branches of pine trees and built, tepee fashion, close to the trunk of a tree. When the pine branches dried out, they made excellent fuel and burning an enemy camp was but the work of a few moments.

My initiation into the gang terrified me. First, I had to cut my finger with a jackknife and write my name with blood in the gang book. Next, I was tied to a tree where, a fire being lit around me and

piled with green grass, I was smoked like a ham hanging in the chimney of our kitchen at home. Then I was sent to the Dean's private orchard with strict instructions to return with none but russet apples. Fortunately, luck was with me and I accomplished the task without being caught. I became a fully fledged member of the gang and to my great delight was made aide-de-camp to General Terence Smith who, like Mickey O'Brien, had eyes of tender innocence at the back of which lurked a carload of devilment.

Bobby, I heard, had fared equally well with his initiation into a rival gang led by Jimmy Doyle, Terence's, and therefore my, sworn enemy. Bobby and I, working under our leaders' banners, plotted each other's ruin. We resorted to all sorts of moves, pillow fights, nettles and hairbrushes in beds, thumb tacks on desk seats, stink bombs, fisticuffs, ambushes and duels. The Irish rebellion of 1922, fer-

menting at the time was, we believed, a tame affair in comparison with our warlike activities.

One afternoon I received permission to ride. Dandy, a broken winded, dapple-grey pony was my mount. While jogging around the riding ring I saw Jimmy Doyle, Bobby and several others approaching. They spoke to me and pretended great interest in Dandy's hind quarters. Too late I realized they had placed a piece of ginger beneath his tail.

Poor Dandy never moved so fast in his life. I hung on as best I could until one of the stirrup leathers parted company with the saddle, unbalancing me and throwing me to the ground where I remained, some minutes, dazed.

When I opened my eyes again I saw Dandy, in the distance, running across some fields. I rose and hobbled after him, not daring to return to the stables without him.

That night, shortly before bed time, I walked into the junior library, a large room, lined with book shelves, with French windows leading out onto a verandah. On the verandah I saw General Terence Smith, his coat off, his sleeves rolled up, in combat with Jimmy Doyle. Terence, I regret to say, was not getting the best of the battle by a long shot.

"Why don't you fight me, Jimmy Doyle?" I yelled excitedly, the afternoon's debacle lingering in my mind.

Everybody stood still and looked at me. Here, they thought, is something new. Buck wants to fight.

Cries of, "Fight Buck, Doyle!" filled the air, leaving Doyle very little choice in the matter.

General Smith retrieved his coat and quit the arena in my favor.

For five minutes, perhaps more, I gave an excellent imitation of a punchbag bouncing before the fists of an experienced

pugilist. I couldn't land a blow and I was quivering with fear. What mad impulse had let me into it! What a fool I had been! But when things really did look black, Doyle hit me such a stinging punch on the chin that I lost my temper and with it my fear. Throwing caution to the winds, I sprang at my adversary, lashing out with right and left, not knowing whether my punches were effective or not. Suddenly, there was no Jimmy Doyle to hit. He lay groaning on the floor, his nose bleeding, his lips cut and one eye very much puffed. The fight was over.

Later, in bed, I spoiled my victory for myself, by crying myself to sleep without knowing why I cried.

A proclamation issued next day from headquarters proclaimed me on equal footing with General Smith except in division of spoils over which he retained full control.

But what of lessons? What of those tortuous hours, tortuous for teacher and pupil alike, when we imbibed mental potions of French, Latin, Gaelic, Greek, Mathematics, History and Geography and Chemistry? What of them, indeed! Must I tell? Must I really tell? Oh, all right! I have forgotten them, all of them.

CHAPTER FOUR

REBELLION

THE history of Ireland is sad history over which in boyhood I many times cried. It is sad because for hundreds of years Ireland was looked upon by England's kings as a vast and beautiful estate to be cut up and divided among their court favorites, and for as many years England's kings looked upon the Irish people as slaves to serve their court favorites.

But Ireland has a proud spirit, a spirit which never has nor ever will be broken. Time and time again down through the years, the people of Ireland have rebelled against British rule. Time and time again the people of Ireland have been on the verge of regaining their freedom but

always at the last something unforeseen has happened to spoil their plans.

As a boy I lived through two such rebellions. The first of these was the rebellion of 1916. I barely recall it, being very young then. Mother and Father, of course, were interested in its every phase and I do recall their tears when they learned that Sir Roger Casement, on returning from the continent where he had made arrangements for the ammunition supply for the rebellion, had been arrested, taken to Britain and there executed as a traitor to the Crown.

Despite Sir Roger Casement's capture, however, the rebellion grew under the leadership of Padraic Pearse and in Easter week it broke out. It broke out in Dublin and was expected to spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. But it did not spread because the people were not united and because it did not spread, it failed. For England,

engaged in war with Germany though she was, it was an easy matter to send soldiers to stifle the rebellion at its root in Dublin. The soldiers arrived. They cornered the "rebels." To prison they took them. Later they shot them. The names of the dead are forever engraved on every Irish heart. Among them are such valiant men as Thomas Clarke whose sons, Thomas and Emmet, were my schoolmates, Padraic Pearse and James Connolly, who, because of his wounds, had to be carried out from his cell and seated in a chair against the prison wall where he was shot to death.

The rebellion of 1922 and the years of its growth, I recall more clearly. Little pictures of it flash before me like lantern slides, clear in every detail. I will put them into words for you.

One morning at breakfast, Father read to us from the paper that England had opened her jails, clothed her convicts in

black uniforms and tan boots and then was shipping them to Ireland to terrorize us.

"Now what do you know about that?" said Father, a hard look to his mouth.

Several days later, I remember Father drawing up a list of the people in the house so that the "Black and Tans" when they raided us might compare it with the number of people on hand at the time. Well, we knew if more people were present and our explanation did not ring true, we would be shot even as others already had been shot, and our house burned to the ground.

Bobby, Terence Smith and I left Waterford by train for Mount Saint Benedict. In the carriage with us was a venerable, white bearded, old man. He was very much frightened, never having been on a train before. We offered him some chocolates. He thought we were trying to poison him and he would not take them.

Two miles out of Waterford, the train pulled up short. Terence looked out of the window.

"The 'Irregulars' are holding up the train," he told us. The old man, more frightened than ever, tried to crawl under a seat. But he was too fat to get all the way under, so he asked us to place our feet on top of him, the way we would hide him. After a while, I went to the window and looked out. Something scratched my chin. A bayonet, it was, in the hands of an "Irregular."

"Take your face in out of that," he ordered. I obeyed. From the luggage van, they took foodstuffs and then they ordered us along.

We travelled to a junction where we were to change trains. As the train pulled into the platform, we noticed the platform crowded with "Irregulars." They tossed our baggage out of the van, ordered us clear of the train and sprinkled

the carriages with petrol. A match was lit. You never saw such a blaze!

By motor car, we finished our journey to Mount Saint Benedict where the Dean's sympathies were all with the "Irregulars." Because of this, the "Black and Tans" many times raided us, in search of ammunition and men on the run from them. Up the drive they would come in their big lorries and we feeling like killing them, every man jack of them. After they searched everybody and every place, they would go into the refectory and order a meal. They had very bad table manners. We saw them tossing joints of meat across the room to one another on their bayonets. Of course, they never left without prisoners. Once, they took Harry Doyle, the cobbler who cared for our shoes. We wondered what we would do when our shoes were worn out. Happy was the thought we might have to go barefooted. To go barefooted, to us, was a great thing.

Oh, I remember one night at "prep," that is, in the preparation room preparing our lessons for next day, when Bobby Coughlin held up his hand.

"What ails you?" asked Kane Smith, the teacher in charge.

"Please, sir, I just saw a hand at the window," Bobby Coughlin said. You could have heard a dove's breast feather floating to earth so great for a minute was the silence. A hand at the window! Was it a ghost? Or was it a "Black and Tan"? One was bad, the other was worse. Kane Smith turned very pale, he being of the "Irregulars" and wanted by the "Black and Tans."

"Who else laid eyes on it?" said he excitedly.

"Please, sir, I did," Paudeen Rogers, Bobby Coughlin's deskmate admitted.

"What window was it at, Coughlin?"

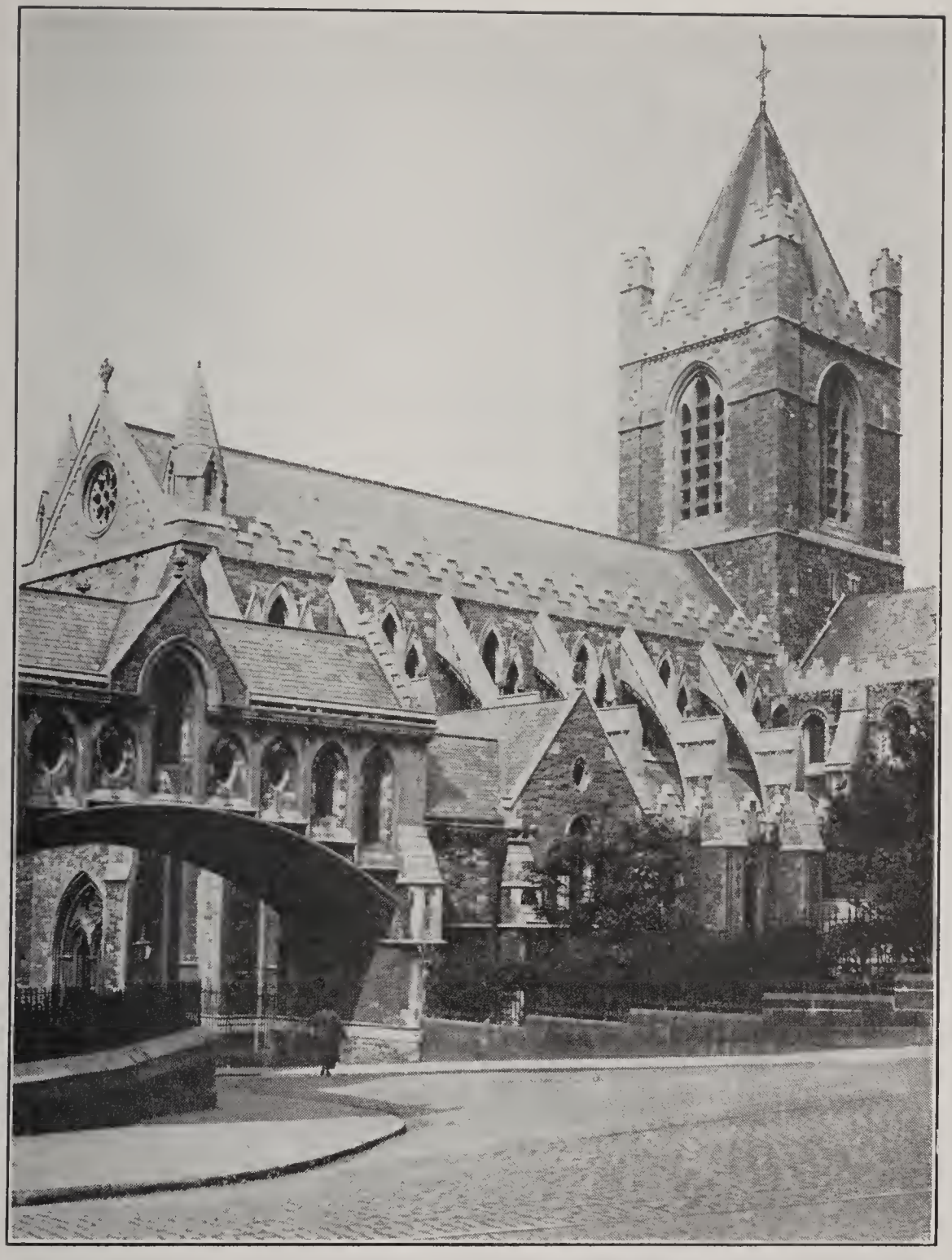
"The window nearest to you, sir."

"What window did you see it at, Rogers?"

"The same, sir."

Then Kane Smith strode the length of the room to their desk. Suddenly he caught them and dragged them to the open floor and knocked their heads together good and hard. Neither Coughlin nor Rogers could see the window nearest him from where they sat. The whole thing was a cod.

Came the good news. The fight was won. Ireland was a free state. That day there was no school at all all day. We went out on the hills and lit bonfires. The Dean ordered currant bread,—a great delicacy,—for tea. We cheered and we cheered and we cheered. We cheered and we hoarse from cheering. We cheered for Michael Collins the man De Valera appointed to beard the Welsh wizard, Lloyd George, in his den. We cheered for De Valera and we did not forget a cheer for poor Terence MacSweeney, Lord Mayor of Cork, who died for the cause,



CHRISTCHURCH, DUBLIN

ALONG THE COAST NEAR CORK

following a seventy odd days' hunger strike.

But the news which at first we thought good news, and we not knowing the terms of the agreement, really was bad news. A *free state!* Sure, the whole thing was a farce: the country divided against itself, six counties staying lock, stock and barrel with England and the rest tied to England as firmly as it ever was except in name.

"The whole thing was De Valera's fault," we said. "Why did not De Valera go to Lloyd George himself? Why send an inexperienced man like Michael Collins? Great fighter and all though he was, he was no diplomat." De Valera, "took it easy," we said, "while the Welsh wizard walked rings 'round poor Michael Collins."

Poor Michael Collins, indeed! He was shot shortly and before we knew it Civil War was with us.

The parties who fought the civil war were the "Free Staters" who were satisfied with what they got and the "Republicans" who wanted a republic or else nothing.

This time the Dean's sympathies were with the "Republicans" so of course, the "Free Staters" paid us a visit, and we grinding our teeth at them for traitors. Out of our warm beds, they roused us in the early morning. They searched our lockers, throwing our clothes on the floor, they searched under our mattresses, finding nothing but forbidden detective stories, and they even searched the water jugs. For what they searched, I don't know. If it was ammunition, wasn't it all well buried in the woods! Outside they had a Lewis gun trained on the house. Miss Keogh, the head matron, lost her temper about it. She went out to the captain and said: "Take that stupid toy away," meaning the gun.

"Faith, we will, Mam, and you along with it," said the captain.

When they left, sure enough they took Miss Keogh. They took her and put her in Kilmainham jail in Dublin. For a few days Miss Keogh sat patient and ladylike, thinking she soon would be released because nothing was known against her. When at the end of a few days they did not release her, and refused to say when they would, why, Miss Keogh just waylaid the jailer, tapped him on the head with his keys, took his clothes and walked out onto the street. Next morning she breakfasted at Mount Saint Benedict after riding half the night on a borrowed green bicycle to get there.

About that time a newspaper was started in Mount Saint Benedict. "The Daily Stinker," it was called. It was written in ink, illustrated and distributed on the "Q.T." The first issue contained war news and a full page caricature of

the Dean fighting the entire Free State Army with one arm tied behind his back. The issue was captured by a vigilant teacher. In it he read the names of the editors and he sent them and "The Daily Stinker" to the Dean.

"This paper must be suppressed," the Dean said.

"All right, Father. Thank you, Father," Terence Smith and I said.

One day had "The Daily Stinker" been out of business, when Gorey, the town three miles distant from our school, was besieged. We were in Latin class when we heard the machine guns begin sending their messages of death. One of us was declining *mensa*. "Mensa,—rat-tat. Mensa, rat-tat. Mensam, ratta-tatta-tat. Mensae, rat-tat. Mensae, rat-tat. Mensa, rata-tatta-tatta-tat. . . ."

"That will do," the teacher said.

For the remainder of the day we listened to the firing, wondering what was

happening, wondering to whom the battle would go. At bed time the report came: "Gorey has been taken by the Republicans." How we cheered!

And still the fighting went on. Great men died on both sides. Father fought against son, brother against brother, cousin against cousin, friend against one time friend. At last in an attempt to stop the flow of blood, the Catholic Church intervened. The Republicans were excommunicated and preached against. It was the beginning of the end. The Free State was with bad grace accepted. The Republicans were crushed for the time being. Cosgrove was elected president. Quiet gradually fell on the land. Mount Saint Benedict was condemned by the new government as a bed of political unrest. It closed its doors. We went home.

CHAPTER FIVE

"THE PLEASANT WATERS OF THE RIVER LEE"

I SAT in a railway carriage, listening to the conversation of three fellow travellers. They were, I gathered, on their way to a race meeting. Yours Only, they agreed, was a "dead cert" for the first race. "Wasn't he only beaten a nose at the Curragh and isn't he up against a handful of three legged jackasses this day?"

My own destination was Cork City where Terence Smith had gone to live some months before and it was to visit with him, I had undertaken my journey.

The racing enthusiasts, having forecast the fate of five other horses, settled down to a game of cards while I pressed my

snub nose to the window and gazed upon the country which was new to me since I had not passed that way before.

"If there has ever been a 'smiling valley,' " thought I to myself, "this is it."

How can I portray those emerald green fields, those whitewashed cottages with their yellow thatched roofs of straw and rough stone chimneys pouring forth delicate, blue, transparent, turf smoke? Why am I not able to transplant to these pages the garden patches, and show to you, it being the spring of the year, the primroses, the bluebells and the daisies, the men sowing the potato crop, the children harrowing the land and the women hanging out their varied colored wash or standing pensively, babe in arms, at their kitchen doors? And in contrast to those scenes, how am I to convey the feeling of awe that filled me, when, from the train window, I saw Lismore Castle rising steeply above the river Blackwater, its

brown stone turrets frowning on the passing of our puny train?

It is a task beyond me, a task for the pen of a great poet, a task for the pen of a William Butler Yeats.

At Mallow, it was necessary for me to change trains. While waiting for my connection, I watched my travelling companions hire a jaunting car and drive away, presumably in the direction of Mallow race course.

The remainder of my journey was without particular incident save when the train to which I transferred started off in the direction from which I had come, filling me with feelings, half of anger and half of dismay. Had I boarded the wrong train? No, thank Heaven! It later circled around towards Cork.

Terence, accompanied by his younger brothers, Jim and Walter, met me at the station. Why it should have been, I do not know, but we were a little shy of each

other at first. This feeling dispelled itself, however, when, on entering a tram car, we found ourselves seated opposite a gargantuan female whose fat overlapped the seat on which she sat. Rude little boys that we undoubtedly were, we stared, amazed at her for a moment before giving way to our uncontrollable mirth.

The tram swayed along Western Road, to Sunview, Terence's home, where we alighted in the best possible spirits. Ellen, the maid, whom I remembered having met in Tramore, answered the door, her usually severe face parted in a welcoming smile. Mrs. Smith received me graciously, as became one of the most gracious ladies it has been my good fortune to meet. Terence's father, I learned, was away on a voyage, captaining an ocean liner.

It started to rain shortly after my arrival and, as I remember it, we spent the

day in the playroom putting on a play for which we charged Mrs. Smith and Ellen sixpence admission fee.

The following day, Terence showed me the city and took me, afterwards, to visit Desmond O'Leary, a schoolmate at Mount Saint Benedict.

Cork, I must liken to a diamond set in an unclean setting, since that is the simile that suggests itself to me.

I cannot recall the names of the principal thoroughfares but they impressed me with their cleanliness. The façades of the low buildings were scrubbed to dazzling whiteness or being scrubbed. The footpaths were as the floor of our kitchen at home after its daily washing; fit to eat from. The shop windows were so highly polished, it seemed they were not present at all and that one could reach past them to the merchandise they protected.

As the main streets impressed me with

their cleanliness, so the side and back streets impressed me with their dirtiness. There on those narrow, twisted, garbage littered streets, lanes and alley ways, overcrowded with cheap tenements whose broken windows were patched with rags, cardboard and paper, we saw dirty children, nigh to nakedness, reviling one another as they played ball with a ball of torn stockings tied together with string. Women of shawl, who in Ireland are called "shawlies," loitered in dark doorways, their fringed, blanket-like shawls swinging loosely from their sloping shoulders while men—the ruins of what once were men—tottered or stumbled from evil smelling public houses, intent on beating their wives and other unfortunates who crossed their path.

Our way to the home of Desmond O'Leary, our school chum, took us over the River Lee whose praisies have been sung

by Reverend Francis Mahoney, author of the *Prout Papers,* in his rhythmic lyric, "The Bells of Shandon," which I take the liberty of quoting here because it was the first lyric I learned of my own free will when I was a boy in Ireland—

With deep affection and recollection
I often think of Shandon bells,
Whose sounds so wild would, in days of childhood,
Fling round my cradle their magic spells—
On this I ponder, where'er I wander,
And thus grow fonder, sweet Cork, of thee;
With thy bells of Shandon,
That sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the river Lee.

I have heard bells chiming full many a clime in,
Tolling sublime in cathedral shrine;
While at a glib rate brass tongues would vibrate,
But all their music spoke nought to thine;
For memory dwelling on each proud swelling
Of thy belfrey knelling its bold notes free,
Made the bells of Shandon

Sound far more grand on
The pleasant waters of the river Lee.

I have heard bells tolling "old Adrian's" mole in,
Their thunder rolling from the Vatican,
With cymbals glorious, swinging uproarious
In the gorgeous turrets of Notre Dame;
But thy sounds were sweeter than the dome of Saint Peter
Flings o'er the Tiber, pealing solemnly.
O! the bells of Shandon
Sound far more grand on
The pleasant waters of the river Lee.

There's a bell in Moscow, while on tower and Kiosko
In St. Sophia the Turkman gets,
And loud in air, calls men to prayer,
From the tapering summit of tall minarets.
Such empty phantom, I freely grant them,
But there's an anthem more dear to me,
It's the Bells of Shandon,
That sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the river Lee.

Reverend Francis Mahoney

We knocked with a highly polished brass knocker on Desmond O'Leary's freshly painted, deep green front door. A footman, moving quietly over deep carpets, admitted us. We inquired for Desmond.

"I shall see if Master Desmond is receiving today," said the footman. Terence and I, waiting in the hallway, flashed one another a look that boded ill for *Master* Desmond. The footman returned: "Master Desmond will see you. This way, please."

We followed that automaton disguised as a man, to a large, richly furnished drawing room. Master Desmond, who had been sitting—would it seem unkind if I said, lolling?—in an armchair before a cheerful, red, coal fire, rose to greet us. As he stepped forward, he gracefully avoided quite the largest box of chocolates, I had ever seen, lying carelessly on the hearth rug.

"So glad to see *you,* boys!" The words dropped from his lips like hot-house grapes falling on cushioned ground.

"And we you, *Master* Desmond," we made sarcastic obeisance.

"What on earth are you doing in town?" inquired our blasé friend, accepting our homage, refusing the sarcasm that went with it.

"I'm visiting with Terence," I answered grimly.

"Does Terence live in this beastly city?" He feigned surprise, addressing his remark to no one in particular. Nobody in particular answered him. It had become too much for us. Terence and I again caught one another's eye and forthwith burst into raucous laughter. The remainder of our visit was decidedly uncomfortable, we visitors being terribly busy planning a suitable revenge when *Master* Desmond returned to school the following term.

"Boys, why don't you take Alan to see Blarney Castle, this lovely day?" Mrs. Smith suggested at the breakfast table on the last day of my visit.

Enthusiastic approval greeted the proposal.

After breakfast, we donned overcoats and scarfs, for although the Spring sunshine was caressing the streets of Cork, a cold breeze interfered between them as if jealous of their union.

Where we went to catch the train to Blarney, I do not know, but I have a vivid recollection of riding through the streets of Cork in a ridiculously small train that seemed to radiate happiness and good cheer, particularly when the engine driver tooted the little whistle. I can recall waving at pedestrians and hearing one of them call after us: "Give it a kiss for me," meaning the Blarney Stone, no doubt.

Blarney Castle! We paused at the en-

ST. PATRICK'S STREET, CORK

ST. FINBARRE'S CATHEDRAL, CORK

trance to pay a small admission fee and to wait for the caretaker to escort us through the castle. Looking at it, from where we stood, we could not help admiring its silent beauty. The massive old trees at its base seemed to say: "You've got to pass me to lay hand on her." They were her bodyguard, the bodyguard of this famous castle built by Cormac MacCarthy in 1446, which, although I knew I was committing a sacrilege in permitting the thought, reminded me of pictures I had seen of Queen Victoria. It had, for me, her air of fierce determination.

"Yewantoseethecastle?" The caretaker, running his words together in that sing song voice peculiar to Cork people and rising to a crescendo on the last syllable, inquired.

"Yes, please." Terence signified that such was our intention.

Together with the keeper, we walked

up the drive and soon with the aid of a key of gigantic proportions, were inside.

Of our journey to the turrets, I am forgetful. But stay—I do remember the keeper, while we were climbing some stone steps, tapping the walls and saying: "You wouldn't be after thinking they were eighteen foot thick, would ye now?"

Who, having stood atop Blarney Castle and looked far out on the countryside could forget the purple haze lingering over the fields, the bleating of sheep carried on the breeze, the cows, like ants in the distance, nibbling the lush green grass to their hearts' content? And who could help, looking down from above, wondering what had happened to the bodyguard of massive trees that seemed but little more than shrubs and to the keeper's cottage a short distance away that looked like a mushroom under which the fairies,

at midnight made merry. Oh Blarney! Beautiful Blarney!

Kissing the Blarney Stone was, for me, a frightening experience. Always, I have been upset looking down from on high, and when I tell you that to obtain the gift of a nimble tongue, I was let down through an iron grill over a yawning chasm of space to touch with my lips the famous stone underlying a turret ridge, you may have an inkling of how I felt. No, I would not repeat the undignified experience. You kiss the Blarney Stone. Let me gaze my fill at the view, my feet planted firmly on the stone terrace beneath them.

The following day, I entrained for home. My holiday was over. How I had enjoyed it! Thank you, once again, Mrs. Smith! Thank you, Terence, Jim and Walter and thank you too, Ellen

who helped make my stay pleasanter by refraining from reporting the bedroom you found, one morning, filled with feathers, following an exciting pillow fight of the night before in which I was hopelessly vanquished.

CHAPTER SIX

DAOINE SIDHE

or

THE FAIRY PEOPLE

Laugh, if you will, but you will not shake my belief in the *daoine sidhe,* the fairy people. I was brought up to believe in them. Mother told me they danced around my cradle the day I was born and it was all she could do to keep them from stealing me and substituting a foundling in my place.

Did I not, with my own two ears, hear the keening of the *ban sidhe,* summoning a soul to Tir-na-n-og, the Land of Youth where happiness grows on trees and is to be had for the picking?

Was I not present when the *daoine*

sidhe threw stones at my uncle's farmhouse in Offaly because the chimney had been cleaned with a branch of holly which the fairy people always consider "a gentle tree"?

Do you doubt my word? If you do it were well you skip this chapter. It tells of fairies and suchlike. But before you go, let me tell you, it is because of your disbelief, the fairies have dwindled in size, being no bigger than a hand span the last time I saw them.

Go now, and may God and all His holy angels protect you from the wrath of the *daoine sidhe!*

Closeby our house, in the three acre field facing the road to be exact, there was a fairy ring, a dark circular patch of grass, we never passed without murmuring: "God be with you, Good People!"

How did we know it was a fairy ring? Did we not leave a saucer of milk by it

every night that we might win the good will of the Good People and was not the saucer empty every morning? Indeed, it was. Aye, and we heard music, such music as has seldom been heard by human ears, coming from the spot many a night. And that is not all. Horses and cattle grazing the field would not go near the "ring" although it grew the sweetest grass for miles around.

Oh, I could tell you more of that "ring" but it is not wise to betray fairy secrets and although I am far away from my native heath, my respect is as great for the *daoine sidhe* as if I lived among them.

There was an elderly woman who visited Tramore every summer. We boys called her Mad Mary from Tipperary, though we were not sure she came from there at all.

Mad Mary had formed the habit of visiting my father's friends, Mr. and Mrs.

Quade and their aunt, Miss Keneally, who owned the Victoria Hotel on Queen Street and it was there that I heard Mad Mary converse with the fairies.

"Away with ye now, and leave a poor body in peace," she commanded an invisible annoyance in the middle of a conversation, we had been having about the fairy people. "They're afraid, I'll tell you too much, *alanna,*" she explained apologetically.

"Who are they?" I made bold to ask.

But Mad Mary never answered my question. Up, she sprang from her chair, protesting frantically, "Let me be! Let me be, I beg of ye! I'll not say a word that's not a good word of ye! Let me be! Let . . ." She whisked past me out of the room as if she were being pushed from it by unseen forces.

I mentioned the incident to Miss Keneally who shook her head sorrowfully. "We'll not see poor Mary for three days

or more," she forecast. And it was so. Nobody could tell where she disappeared to and people, in time, ceased to bother her with questions because there was a light in her eyes that was not a human light.

The *ban sidhe,* meaning the fairy woman, is an unwelcome but greatly respected visitor at the houses of those over whose destinies she chooses to preside. It is said of her that she only visits those whose names are preceded by an "O" or a "Mac"; such people being descendants of the earliest settlers in Ireland—some of them, indeed, claim kings and queens for ancestors.

I heard the *ban sidhe* when Seamus O'Dougherty lay dying.

Seamus, a friendly neighbor, had injured his spine falling from a horse. The doctor said he would recover. But I was with Seamus in his bedroom when we

both heard a low, whining sob at the window.

"It's a baby crying! Who can it be?" I exclaimed. Seamus held up his hand, bidding me be quiet.

"It's no baby crying," he said, and I noticed his face was deathly pale. The cry increased in pitch. It became a keen, a wail, a wail of anguish, the wail of a broken heart. Frightened, terribly frightened, I clutched Seamus' hand. "Don't you fret, *a mic*. It's for me she is keening."

Then I knew I had heard the *ban sidhe*. Silently, I left the room.

Seamus' mother looked up at me from her seat by the hearth as I crossed the kitchen. "She'll come for him tonight," she prophesied.

What madness possessed me, I do not know. Usually, I am a timid soul, and I have confessed I was frightened in Seamus' bedroom, but when I left the

house, I walked by the window where the *ban sidhe* had keened. There, on the ground, I found a comb, the comb of the *ban sidhe;* for it is well known that the *ban sidhe,* even when keening, is forever combing the tangles from her ankle length hair. I picked up the comb and took it home.

Only once has my mother lost her temper with me and slapped me. It was on that occasion. Striking me a sharp blow in the face: "Take that comb to the fairy ring," she commanded.

In the morning, it was gone and the drawn blinds and the black crepe on the door at O'Dougherty's house told us Seamus was gone—gone to *Tir-na-n-og.*

The *daoine sidhe* celebrate three festivals during the year. As we have our Christmas, New Year and Easter, they have their November Eve, May Eve and Midsummer Eve.

I learned something of these festivals one Halloween night sitting around a log fire with a group of schoolchums, listening to the stories that fell from the lips of Mr. Griffith, our history teacher at Mount Saint Benedict.

On November Eve, he would have it, the *daoine sidhe* are particularly sad for on that night they open the graves of the dead and dance with ghosts on graveyard tombstones. They endeavor on this night, above all other nights, to capture a mortal musician and have him play for them.

It is on November Eve, also, the Puca, a very famous fairy, comes down from the mountains, putting his curse on the blackberries, rendering them unfit to eat after that date.

The Puca comes in various forms; sometimes as a donkey, sometimes a horse, sometimes an eagle, but whatever his shape or form, if kindly spoken to, the

Puca will answer all manner of important questions concerning happenings of the coming year.

May Eve, Mr. Griffith told us, is a day devoted by the fairy people to pugilistic combat, especially every seventh year when they fight among themselves for the crops, taking as their spoil the finest ears of wheat, barley and oats. With the barley and with dew gathered from a mountain top at midnight they make a potent liquor, one drink of which is sufficient to set them to dancing for twenty-four hours without pausing to catch breath.

You did not know the fairy people were such great dancers, did you? Oh, yes indeed they are! They keep the *lepracaun,* their cobbler and only one among them that ever does a stroke of work, busy making new shoes for them, because they wear them out so quickly at their dances.

Midsummer Eve finds the *daoine sidhe* at their merriest. Mr. Griffith warned us that if we ever grew up to have a beautiful daughter, we were to be sure and keep her indoors on Midsummer Eve because that is when the *daoine sidhe* steal, for themselves, beautiful mortal brides.

He knew of a girl who had been so treated. She disappeared for seven years and when she came back, her feet were worn off from dancing, she was as ugly as an ugly duckling and she roamed about the countryside on crutches the rest of her mortal days, muttering, "At your service M'lord. At your service!"

Mike O'Dermody, a travelling tinker man, showed up at our house one day, offering his tinware for sale, which, as you may have heard, is the way tinkers make a living when they are not stealing horses, chickens and donkeys. Shortly after Mike's visit, I had occasion to go

to the hen house to collect the eggs and there, I found Mike with two of our hens stuffed under his coat, just about to make his departure. "Don't tell your father, sweet mister," he pleaded.

Now, it had been rumored that this tinker man had had an experience with the fairies but what it was he had never been known to tell, fearing that he would be humiliated and looked down upon. I seized my opportunity.

"Tell what the fairies did to you and I will not tell on you," I bargained. After a great deal of hemming and hawing he agreed and it is fortunate that he set no seal on my lips for I am now able to tell you about it and a most extraordinary story it is.

Mike had stolen a chicken from a herb woman and friend of the *daoine sidhe,* named Anty Burns. He had but digested the delicate and tender bird when the fairy people laid hands on him, reduced him in

size and transported him astride a will-o-the-wisp to a "ring" not far from the home of the herb woman, three miles north of Thurles town in the county Tipperary.

There, in secret chambers, underground, Mike was tried by the fairy court for the crime he had committed. Although his guilt was common knowledge, he received a fair and honest trial.

The jury, without retiring, rendered a verdict of guilty and then the judge, a wee bit of a fairy, dressed in flowing green robes and sporting a curled peruke, pronounced sentence:

"Mike O'Dermody," said he, "it is my bounden and pleasurable duty to sentence you, to sentence you to the hatching of an egg and to raise the chicken thus hatched until it resembles, in size and delicacy, the chicken you stole from our good friend the herb woman."

Poor Mike was bewildered. Never had he heard of such treatment accorded to

living mortal before. Think what his brethren, encamped, at that very moment under the tilted, tribal carts not a handful of miles away, would say if they heard tell of it! But his spirit did not break entirely until the entire aggregation of fairies, after the verdict was pronounced, rose to their feet and sang—

"Haha, haha, ha, ha, ha!
He's going to hatch an egg,
And before he's done, he'll beg
Ripe corn meal and oats to eat,
And be sitting on his feet.
Haha, haha, ha, ha, ha!"

Little did Mike think that the words of the song were an accurate forecast of the treatment he was to receive. But he was not long finding out. No, indeed!

The first meal served up to him in his strange and novel capacity of setting hen was a handful of corn meal and a handful of oats, at which he was forced to

peck, because of the egg beneath him that cried, it was catching its death of cold, if he rose as much as half an inch from it.

In due course Mike hatched the egg and likewise in due course it grew as prescribed by the law. Mike was then strapped to the back of his offspring and sent flying to the house of Anty Burns.

Mike and the chicken entered the herb woman's house by way of the chimney. The herbwoman was seated by the fire and as they came tumbling down, she spread open her black calico apron and caught them in it, saving them from the fire.

"I've got you at last, Mike O'Dermody, bad scran to your thieving hide," the herbwoman screamed.

"*Arra,* come now, Anty dear, it's too hard you do be leaning on a poor but honest man," Mike defended himself.

"Aye, you red headed rascal, as hon-

est as a jackdaw in a box of silver," belittled the herbwoman.

Mike, never a diplomat, chose that unfortunate moment to beg Anty to restore him to his mortal size, for he was still no bigger than a fairy.

"Mortal size, is it?" Anty snorted with anger. "I'll not restore you to your mortal size, my fine bucko. I'm going to boil you in the herb pot and use the juice that comes from your ugly bones to wash the cow's udder clear of ticks."

"God bless us and save us, you wouldn't be after doing that, would you, Anty?" Mike pleaded for his life and as he pleaded, inspiration came to him. "Anty," he cried, "if you'll only let me free, I'll make you a whole set of tin pots. Think of it, Anty, a whole set of shiny, new, tin pots."

"Begad," said Anty, scratching her old grey pate, "it's a set of pots, I do be needing right badly but, heed you well,

Mike O'Dermody, tinker man, if you ever steal as much as a halfpenny's worth of snuff from Anty Burns in time to come, I'll have your life from you, you low living, crawling, roofless, dirty, sneaking, night prowling, chicken stealing, conniving, useless good-for-nothing, black beast of a drunken horse thief!"

"God bless you for a fine woman, Anty," ejaculated Mike, vastly relieved.

As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, I have a great respect for the fairy people; if therefore, this story, told to me by Mike O'Dermody, be untrue, I apologise to the fairy people and to the printer of this little book, whose press, if it be untrue, they will surely smash to smithereens.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A VISIT TO ROSCREA AND TO BIRR

"Bob and Al!" Father's voice, serious in tone, reached us from the dining room.

"Coming, Father!"

Bobby and I walked into the room, nervously wondering which of our many sins had been discovered.

"Boys, I have something important to say to you."

"What is it, Father?"

"Mother is dangerously ill as you know and the doctor says we must have quiet in the house if she is to recover."

"We'll be quiet; quiet as mice."

"That won't be necessary, boys. You see, I have arranged for you to spend a month with your Uncle Eddy . . ."

"Mother won't die while we're away, will she, Father?" I interrupted.

"Of course not. What nonsense you talk!"

"When are you sending us away, Father?" Bobby asked.

"Tomorrow. You'll stop over tomorrow night with your Aunt Rita at Roscrea and the following day go to your uncle's."

"All right, Father. Whatever you say."

"And mind you, if I hear any bad reports . . . well, . . ." Father cast an eye that finished his sentence at a hunting crop, hanging beneath the autographed picture of his friend, Danny Maher, famous American jockey.

"I'll see that Al behaves himself, Father," volunteered my elder, Bobby.

"Have an eye to your own conduct as well, young man," Father advised, tak-

ing Bobby down a peg much to my delight.

Aunt Rita met us at the railway station at Roscrea, which is the town farthest north in the County Tipperary. It was early afternoon when we arrived. To amuse us Aunt Rita took us to see the town and some of its famous landmarks.

We first visited the round tower. This tower stands near the famous abbey of ancient times founded by Saint Cronan. It stands about eighty feet high and although badly in need of repair is very beautiful to look upon. With Aunt Rita's help, Bobby and I climbed up to a window about ten feet above the ground. On one side of the window at about the halfway mark in its height we saw carved in relief a one masted ship. On the opposite side we saw also carved in relief a

funny looking cross. Aunt Rita told us that the figure of the ship proved the tower to be of very ancient origin because that type of ship was the emblem of *Una* of the Pagan Irish. What the cross meant she could not tell us.

Next Aunt Rita took us to see Saint Cronan's new church. The church built by Saint Cronan himself near the round tower is now only ruins and the people of Roscrea built the new church for the saint, he being their patron. About all I can remember of the new church is its situation and that is a beautiful memory. A little river, named the Brusna, flows nearby, hawthorne trees grace its banks, green fields wind up from it to the church and on the hill above stands the Convent of the Sacred Heart where mother went to school as a little girl.

We visited this convent and the nuns were very nice to us. They said I was the image of my mother and I felt very

proud and said I would save up what they said to tell Mother when I went home. Then they served tea for us and we ate with our tea some delicious biscuits covered with hard, pink icing; to think of them makes my mouth water even now.

In harsh contrast to the round tower, the church and the convent was the place we next visited, but it was every bit as interesting and Bobby and I enjoyed ourselves hugely. What place was it? It was the bacon factory. Roscrea's famous bacon factory. Mr. Owen, manager of the factory and friend of Aunt Rita's undertook to show us how pigs were "killed and cured." It seemed strange to us, pigs should be killed before being cured but, Mr. Owen chuckling at our surprised faces, explained that curing pigs meant preserving them.

We began our tour in the stockyards where the odor was none too pleasant and the pigs grunted and rooted in their sties

ignorant of what fate had in store for them.

From the stockyards we went inside the factory and we saw the iron bar along which the dead pigs were passed to the furnace high above the ground. In the furnace they were singed. Then they were dropped down into a trough of water on the ground below. A man, wielding a knife shaped like a cutlass, stood by the trough and scraped and washed and passed the pigs to a butcher who cleaved and cleaned accurately and with great speed until the very pigs we had seen rooting and grunting in their sties a scant thirty minutes before were reduced to so many sides, so many heads, so many feet and so many sausages to be shipped to lovers of Irish bacon the world over.

As we left the factory, Mr. Owen gave us some pigs' bladders which we inflated and which we carried with us as we would

toy balloons. So ended our tour of Roscrea.

We slept that night on a feather mattress in a curtained, four poster bed that we had to climb up to on a ladder of carpeted steps. What a bed for a pillow fight! But we were asleep, exhausted by the day's excitement, before Aunt Rita blew out the candles and kissed us good night.

The following morning our uncle drove over from Birr, nine miles away in the county of Offaly, where we returned with him later in the day.

It was difficult for us to reconcile ourselves to the sudden and drastic change of scenery, we experienced driving from Tipperary into Offaly. On the road out from Roscrea, we passed verdant pastures, tilled fields boasting fat and bursting crops and flower gardens and orchards no less content, and healthy.

Then, a battered, wooden, worm eaten

and moss overgrown sign on which the name Offaly was faintly discernible flashed by us, and suddenly, without warning, we came upon stark, bleak countryside. Where there had been succulent grasses waving in the breeze now were barren, rock strewn fields. Low lying, tilled plains gave way to harsh, forbidding hills while gardens and orchards disappeared into bogs and wasteland.

We had passed from "contented land" to "mean land" that had, constantly, to be reminded of the power of man and even then responded but poorly.

Birr! Oh, what a story I could tell of Birr had I lived there in the third century when Cormac, son of Cond of the Hundred Battles fought the people of Munster or in the twelfth century when Thorlogh, son of Roderick O'Connor, king of Ireland, laid siege to the warlike clan of the O'Carrols! But I was a boy

of the twentieth century who saw little that was romantic in the sprawling town of narrow streets and dark alleyways, of grey stone churches, of market place made uglier by an ugly statue of the Duke of Cumberland and of castle, rising up from the mud of the slums to house the Earls of Ross.

"E. L. Madden & Son," read the varnished signboard over our uncle's bar and grocery shop on Main Street. A large, yellow-washed, rambling house topped the shop and stretched out way behind it wherein we stayed for seven days living life as it is lived "behind the counter" in Ireland.

Early every morning, Willie Delaney, the boy who drove the delivery wagon and did odd jobs in store and yard, took down the shutters from the two shop windows, one of which displayed groceries, the other, whiskies, wines and ales.

Two movable counters were then car-

ried onto the street and on them, during the day, was displayed bacon which had been brought up from the cellar beneath the shop.

Bobby and I learned, to our surprise, that Uncle Eddy sold a great deal more Canadian bacon than he did Irish bacon. It seemed incredible, but when he explained to us that Irish bacon commanded a high price on the foreign market, we came to understand the Irish farmer's policy of selling his own bacon at a high price and purchasing Canadian bacon for which he paid a low price.

As the day progressed, customers trooped in, the men to drink, the women to buy groceries and perhaps when they had attended to their purchases and were waiting for Alice Flanagan, the shopgirl, to make out their bill they, too, would take "a little something" to warm them inside. The women, however, never drank at the bar. They had a room to themselves, off

the room where our uncle transacted his shipping agency business.

The Shipping Agency Room! How many fine young Irishmen have crossed the threshold of that room with but one thought in mind—to leave Ireland. And for every one of them who booked passage, there was an anxious mother who would come to see our uncle every day after her boy had sailed, asking, begging pitifully with the voice of a reed torn by the North Wind, "Has my boy landed yet, Mr. Madden? He's still at sea, you say? But, didn't he leave three whole days ago? He's not drowned, is he Mr. Madden, and you hiding it from me? I'm his mother, I should know, Mr. Madden, if anything has happened to my boy. What's that you say: seven days to America? Seven days to America! God bless us and save us, Amen!"

Perhaps a month later the letter would come from overseas. Her boy was safe.

He was working. He had enclosed a mite of money for his mother. Would Mr. Madden in all his goodness, cash it for her for she'd be murdered entirely if she could understand the foreign money? Her boy said in his letter, he would be home any day now. Her boy would be home any day now, any day now, any day now; year after year her boy would be home any day now until she was coffined in a coffin paid for with money from her boy in America who would be home any day now.

Saturday was the busiest day of the week for Uncle Eddy, it being market day when the farmers, their wives and children came to town to purchase their weekly supplies.

They did not come into the shop until late afternoon, occupying the morning hours disposing of their butter, eggs, chickens and vegetables in the market place.

Some of them, however, scorned the market place and would bring their produce direct to our uncle who either sold it in the shop, or sent it to the Dublin market where it fetched a good price. I remember a Mrs. Caly given to this habit.

Mrs. Caly would come into the shop, her little beaded bonnet perched saucily askew her grey haired head, a smile lighting her tight little mouth. "Good day to ye, Mr. Madden! Fine day thanks be to God! What is the butter fetching today, Mr. Madden?"

"Is it yourself is in it, Mrs. Caly? The butter is fetching one and sixpence the pound today, my darling." Uncle Eddy always "darlinged" his women customers. "Makes them feel young," he would tell you.

I never think of Mrs. Caly without seeing her son, Jamesie beside her. It was Jamesie's job to drive his mother to

town on Saturdays. Mother and son would untackle the pony together, in the yard, before coming into the shop. They had one of the flightiest ponies I have ever seen. How little Mrs. Caly had courage to sit behind the beast when he was forever kicking the buck-board out of the trap was more than I could ever fathom.

Jamesie, as I remember him, was a tall, thin young man with a young edition of his mother's tiny face and her same, squeaky high pitched voice. Men at the bar joked about him because he was thirty years old and had never shaved. "By the beard of Jamesie Caly," they would swear in his hearing, making him blush. It was whispered, discreetly to be sure, by people who have knowledge of such things, that Jamesie was a foundling.

At night, around the hour of nine o'clock, the store was closed. Alice Flannagan and Uncle Eddy then busied them-

selves over the books and the yield of the till. How much money had they taken that day? Was it up to yesterday's "take"? Was it as good as the "take" of that day a week ago? All these were important questions to be decided while Willie Delaney swept up the sawdust and washed the floor.

Sometimes, Bobby and I were allowed to lend a hand washing glasses at the bar. Oh, but our uncle was particular about those glasses; one speck and they had to be washed all over again!

At last, the questions of importance being settled, Uncle Eddy would clear his throat and pronounce in his jolly voice, "Not such a bad day, thanks be to God! It could have been worse, as the fellow said."

It was after such a day and on such a night, our uncle took us to his farm at Knockarlow, where his wife, our Aunt Mary, and his children, our cousins, Nora,

Mary, Eithne and Michael lived during three seasons of the year, coming into the rambling house over the shop only for the winter months.

CHAPTER EIGHT

KNOCKARLOW

Uncle Eddy's Ford stalled on the rocky hill in the *bohereen* at Knockarlow. We proceeded on foot, guided by the candle lit windows of the farmhouse. Aunt Mary, her fair hair sheening, her blue eyes sparkling and a shy smile parting her full red lips, bade us welcome and insisted that we remove our boots which were in a sorry state, being covered with yellow mud of the *bohereen* and squelching with water from the puddles we had stepped into in the dark.

While Bunty Breen, raven tressed working girl, made tea for us, hanging the kettle on a wire hook swinging from the iron bar that grew up beside and over

the turf fire, we made the acquaintance of our cousins.

Mary, the eldest, was then seven and her sisters Nora and Eithne and her brother Michael filled the span of her young life at intervals of two years.

Well do I remember the foolish attempt made by Bobby and me to impress our cousins as men of the world. Alas, we were laughed out of countenance by Mary who remarked solemnly: "I expect they'll stop showing off when they get to know us." Even Michael saw no harm in kicking his pudgy little legs over the rail of his cradle, exposing his bare, pink cheeked bottom, and joining in the screams of laughter that greeted his sister's remark.

The days that followed were filled with strange, new and exciting experiences.

We rose every morning at cock crow in order to have done with breakfast before the workmen arrived. When we

trooped downstairs to the kitchen to wash ourselves in the large community, white enamelled basin—their being no bathrooms at Knockarlow—we would find Aunt Mary and Bunty frying bacon and eggs and stirring the porridge for the morning meal.

The workmen arrived at eight o'clock. Mike Maher, a herdsman who lived on the place in a small whitewashed cottage at the bottom of the hill field was usually the first to put in an appearance. He would come into the kitchen, before Uncle Eddy left for town, to receive instructions as to how the day's work should proceed.

Uncle Eddy, at that time, knew a great deal more about shopkeeping than he did about farming, having purchased the farm but a year before. It afforded us, therefore, much amusment to hear him give Mike his orders. Mike, no matter what our uncle suggested, always had

his own way and did what he thought best. It was only for appearances' sake he approached Uncle Eddy at all.

Fortunately, Mike had a head on him for farming. He had been brought up to it and everything he did turned out for the best.

Mike's first duty in the morning was to bring in the cows to be milked from the pasture alongside the bog where they spent their nights in mild weather.

The arrival of the cows was a signal for the farmyard cats, several in number, to hie themselves to the cow house and to sit open-mouthed, on their hind legs, until Mike, beginning to milk, would direct thin streams of warm milk into their mouths. We had never seen cats drink that way before. It was a great surprise to us.

Ned Halley, if he was in good humor, would help Mike with the milking although it was not considered part of his

duties. Ned was a strange boy. In all but years he was a man. His strength was tremendous particularly if his terrible temper, for which he was feared throughout the countryside, was in evidence.

I have seen Ned strike a bullock between the eyes with his bare fist and watched with awe the bullock slump unconscious to the ground.

Aunt Mary would be furious with him for days if she found out about such things.

Once, Mike being absent, Ned brought in the cows and as they came ambling into the yard one of them stepped out of line, infuriating Ned so that he threw a cudgel at the unfortunate beast. Aunt Mary, looking from the kitchen window, saw what had happened and, becoming incensed, ran into the yard and caught Ned by the shoulders and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. Ned looked quietly

at her until her fury spent itself and then he pronounced calmly and without visible emotion, "If 'twas a man done that, Mam, his broken head would be lying at your feet this minute."

Nevertheless, he never laid hand to the cattle after that. Aunt Mary had won a moral victory and Ned's everlasting respect.

To hear Mike give orders to Ned was an experience by itself.

"Ned," Mike would begin, in what he hoped was a winning voice, "what were you thinking of turning your hand to today?"

"*Musha,* I may as well take the brown mare to the forge. She's badly in need of a set of shoes," Ned would reply if that is what he had in mind.

"That's good, Ned. That's good. The boss would want you should do that," Mike, happy to escape an outburst of Ned's temper, would agree.

Then, at lunchtime when the workmen

filled the big stonefloored kitchen, Mike seeing Ned whom he believed at the forge, could not resist commenting, "Look at here, Ned Halley, I thought you were taking the brown mare to the forge."

"Glory be to the great God on high, Mike Maher, must you always be tormenting me? How could I take the brown mare to the forge when I had to go to the bog to cut the turf?"

"Who told you to cut the turf?"

"Who told me? Who told me, is it? The back of my hand to you, Mike Maher, for an ignorant *amadan!* Don't you know full well if the turf isn't cut this week, you might as well leave it rot in the ground for it will never dry against the winter?"

And so they would argue back and forth across the table until Ned, exasperated beyond endurance would fling his knife and fork to the table and leave the room.

One day, Bobby and I went with Ned

to the bog to watch him cut the turf.

The bog fascinated us. We lagged behind Ned, admiring its strange, brooding beauty. Probably, our greatest thrill came when loitering by a bog hole, looking at our reflections in the depths of its rust colored water, we heard a rustling noise in the bracken behind us and, a moment later, a whirr of wings as a pheasant took the air.

We longed for the double barrelled shotgun hanging on a rafter of the kitchen ceiling. What joy would have been ours had we returned with a pheasant for the roasting pot! But no, it was the breeding season and the farmers, whose farms skirted the bog, would have tanned our hides had we perpetrated such an outrage.

Ned was busy with his breast slane, the double bladed instrument, with handle resembling the letter "T," used in cutting turf close to the surface, when we caught

up with him. He worked in his bare feet to save his boots from the soggy ground, and we saw the soft turf oozing between his toes. (Is there any more delightful sensation for a boy than the feeling of soft ground, be it mud or turf, oozing between his toes?)

Each time that Ned pressed his breast to the handle of the slane, the two blades, set at right angles to one another, sunk into the rich, red surface turf and sliced a bricklike cake that he deftly caught up and tossed out onto the ground.

All day we remained on the bog and when, in the early afternoon, tired of playing hide and go seek among the rushes and purple heather, we begged Ned to allow us handle the slane, he agreed.

"But this is not the slane you were using this morning!" Bobby, taking it and examining it, exclaimed.

"To be sure it's not," Ned admitted,

"That, that you have in your hand, Bobby, is a foot slane. You see when we dig way down to the black turf and the water starts seeping in, it's easier to shovel it up with the foot slane. Watch me now and you'll see how it's done and maybe learn the knack of it."

We watched eagerly as Ned placed his bare instep on the footrest fixed to the straight handle close to the blades and, pressing down, heeled the sod of turf onto the blades and pitched it up at our feet. It seemed quite simple, and we were anxious to show Ned we could emulate his example.

Bobby jumped into the pit and with Ned to guide him managed to get the sod onto the blades, but when it came to tossing it up, his strength failed him and the sod fell back into the pit.

"Better luck next time, *a mic!*" Ned encouraged.

Then it was my turn. By the powers

that be, I would show them! I was the boy to toss the sod a mile high in the air if necessary! I was so confident of my ability that I went through the elaborate ritual of removing my coat, rolling up my sleeves and, as I had seen Ned do to get a good grip on the slane handle, spitting on my hands. I got the sod onto the blades easily enough and then with a mighty heave, I heaved—heaved the sod no higher than my head, slipped on the sodden ground and wound up on my bottom on the floor of the pit.

That evening, walking down the bog road, the curlews' mournful note sounding in our ears, the will-o-the-wisps dancing before us on the rush tops trying to lure us, before our time, to *Tir-na-n-og,* Ned told us how the turf had to be worked before it was brought into the farmyard to be stacked for winter use.

When it had all been cut, it had to be spread flat on the ground to dry. After

several days, if God was good and the weather fine, it would be built into small mounds, called "stooks," and, if God continued to be good and the weather, as a result of His goodness, continued to be fine, in another week it would be built into larger mounds. When it was thoroughly dry and not a split second before, they would go to the bog with donkey and creel; creel being the name given to a wheelless vehicle of two long shafts to which a large basket is tied. The turf would be piled into the creel and trips would be made back and forth until all the turf had been won from the bog.

What did Aunt Mary do, besides shaking Ned Scully for beating the cows and looking after her brood and cooking for the house with none, save Bunty, to help her? What did she do? If you must know, she made butter, the best butter, the richest butter, the tastiest butter in the whole of Ireland.

I shall not remove my hat to another when it comes to butter making, for Aunt Mary is so far first, there is no second. Tuesdays and Fridays were, by virtue of Aunt Mary's say so, churning days at Knockarlow.

On those days, strangers entering the kitchen, where the barrel shaped churn swung carelessly on its wooden supports, were viewed with suspicion lest they have the evil eye and use it to render barren the cream; a commoner practice than you would imagine and one not to be sneered at under any circumstance.

Now that I am inviting you to Aunt Mary's kitchen to see, as I saw when I was a boy, the churning in progress, I tell you that on entering you must say, "God Bless the butter!" and that it will be expected of you to give the churn a turn, by which action you will show you are not possessed of the evil eye. Come!

The raven tressed girl lifting the three

legged pot of boiling water from the fire is Bunty Breen. She has a tongue as sharp as vinegar at times so do not get in her way. That is Aunt Mary, you see, by the churn, directing Bunty who is now pouring the water into the churn, scalding it. Aunty Mary screws down the lid of the churn and swishes the water around inside while Bunty hurries out to the pump in the yard for a bucket of water. Bunty is back with the water but she lays it aside. Why? See for yourself! Yes, it is a bag of salt she has taken from the hearth where it is kept lest the dampness soften it. What is she doing with it? Well, when you were not looking, Aunt Mary emptied the churn of water and now, Bunty, her sleeves rolled back, her raven tresses dancing a Highland Fling, is rubbing the salt against the sides of the churn, using her full strength because she knows that a clean churn is half the battle won in making butter. Now

for the cold water. Swish! 'Round and around it goes. It certainly ought to be thoroughly clean by now. But no, there is Bunty fetching another pot of boiling water from the fire, scalding the churn again. And now another bucket of cold water. Will they ever finish? Yes, now, the churn is clean.

While Aunty Mary and Bunty disappear into the dairy to fetch the cream, let me tell you, the little button on the lid of the churn is an air release. Aunty Mary and Bunty will press it with their thumbs at intervals during the churning and the compressed air will rush out, making a great to-do and noise of whistling which you must not allow to startle you as it did me when I was new to the ways of churning.

Here they come! You would not think there was so much cream in all the world, would you? All of it came from nine cows in three days. There they go, swing-

ing it off the floor. One, two, three and up! How smoothly it flows into the churn! "Screw down the lid, Bunty, like a good girl." Aunt Mary always calls Bunty a good girl and she the wildest tom-boy in four provinces. But what is the delay? Why has Bunty left the kitchen now? Patience! Here she is, back already! The bottle, she went to fetch, is of Holy Water. Aunt Mary takes it from her, uncorks it and sprinkles the churn: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen."

Bunty takes first turn at the handle while Aunt Mary busies herself getting ready the utensils to be used when the churn has accomplished all that is expected of it.

But there, Bunty's roving eye has lit on you. Now, go up to her and say, "God save you kindly, good girl!" She will give you back the ritual: "God save *you* kindly, kind reader!" before yielding her place to

you. Stay! Before turning the handle, Bless yourself with the Holy Water. Ready now! Start turning, slowly at first, throwing your weight on your forward foot as the handle swings away from you and on your rear foot as it swings to you. Heavier than you thought, is it not? It was swinging the churn that gave Aunt Mary and Bunty the muscle that makes most men and all women fear and respect them.

It is now Aunt Mary's turn at the handle. Bunty goes to sit by the fire to rest. The churn somersaults through the air, like a little boy's hoop, before Aunt Mary's fast, rhythmically moving arm.

What is that noise of bicycle pedals being reversed? Where does it come from? From the churn? Yes, from the churn. It is the yellow beads of butter beating against its sides.

Bunty rises from her stool by the fire and pulls out the stopper from the base of

the churn and catches the outflowing buttermilk in a large pan. "That's the stuff to grow hair on your chest," she laughs, gazing at the small particles of butter, dancing lightly on top of the milk. She replaces the stopper. Aunty Mary gives the churn a few turns that the butter may form itself into a compact mass and then calls, "Unscrew the lid, Bunty, like a good girl."

Behold! They have captured the sun and all of its golden beauty in the bottom of a churn!

It is Aunt Mary who fetches the bag of salt from the hearth this time. See, she is casting handfulls of it over the golden mass. Now she is kneading to blend butter and salt. "Come here, Bunty, like a good girl and taste the butter." Glory be to Saint Peter! Bunty has taken a liking to you, and she usually as shy as a faun with strangers. She wants you to taste the butter. A little too salty, you

say? Aunt Mary agrees with you: "A little too salty it is." She compliments you on your keen taste. Then, "Bring me some water, Bunty, like a good girl!" she asks. Bunty brings the water and between them they wash the butter until it is freed from surplus salt.

The paddles and weighing scales are brought from the dairy and, as you can see for yourself, the butter is patted into pound pieces and set on a platter lined with cabbage leaves to keep it cool and fresh.

Aunt Mary will consider you ungracious if you go without joining her in a cup of tea. Oh, and by the way, be sure to God bless the cows who made the butter possible, before you leave.

CHAPTER NINE

THE NOBLE COUNTESS

Before bidding farewell to Knockarlow, the farm on the low hill, I want to tell you how we spent our last evening there and the story we heard from the withered lips of a wandering herb woman and story teller who visited with us that evening.

After a day of farewells to places and people we had come to love, we sat with our cousins, our uncle and aunt, around the turf fire in the kitchen talking over the "high spots" of our visit. It was pleasant to be so occupied and we were resentful at first at the intrusion of an old, bent, spent woman who raised the latch of the kitchen door and walked in among us.

"God save you kindly," were her first words.

"And you too, old woman," Uncle Eddy made answer for all.

"It's a bit of a tale I would be spinning for the young lads leaving the shelter of this roof tomorrow." The herb woman, speaking in a voice that seemed to come from another world, made known.

"How did you know we were going away, old woman?" I asked, surprised at her knowledge.

"It came to me two nights back and I sleeping on top of a mountainy hill in the county Galway."

Her explanation filled us with respect for her, for surely there could be no doubt that she was possessed of the "second sight."

"You'll be having a cup of tea, kind woman?" Aunt Mary invited.

"Not until I tell the tale, *a vourneen deelish,*" answered the herb woman, af-

fectionately dubbing my aunt her little loved one.

Uncle Eddy made a place for the herb woman by the fire and when she was seated comfortably, her bony, vein threaded hands stretched over the fire to catch some of its warmth, she began her tale, the tale of *The Noble Countess Kathleen O'Shea:*

"A long time ago—aye, even before my time, it was—a woeful scarcity of food settled on the land, causing the flesh of the people to tighten on their bones and a hard, ferocious look to come into their eyes. The potato crop, to make matters worse, went black in the ground that year and there was no saving the hay at all, except for bedding for the cows, after the rain had worked its way with it. *Och,* 'twas as if there was a curse on the land!" The old woman paused and crossed herself to ward off the evil attendant on her observation. Then she continued:

"Well, bedad, in the midst of all the misfortune, who should come parading the countryside but a couple of the ugliest looking *spalpeens* you ever laid eyes on, and they loaded down with the curse of mankind: filthy gold. The devil's own children they were and no mistake. But there I go slipping the halter and spoiling the tale, as the saying is.

"The two of them never tarried for bite nor sup nor rest 'till they came to the town where the Countess Kathleen O'Shea was in residence. There it was they put up at the inn of Mary Walshe, a decent but misguided poor soul as you'll soon see.

"It wasn't no more nor no less than two days before Mary—God grant her perpetual rest—took the notion to have a word with her queer lodgers.

" 'Gentlemen,' she says, says she, ' 'tis a great wonder, you, with all your gold, wouldn't be after helping the poor people

who, as you can see for yourselves, are nigh and next door to starving.'

" 'My kind and dear lady,' they made bold to answer as brazen as a couple of bog ponies, 'waiting it is, we are, for the poor people, whom we pity so much, we're near to tears, to come to us, for we don't care overmuch to be parading our riches in times like these, lest we be judged in league with the Evil One!'

" 'Faith, it's scarce thinking that of you, they'll be,' said the poor innocent Mary, and she, as quick as a wild duck flying from danger, let everyone in town and country 'round and about know of the men with the gold.

"Ochone, Ochone," the old woman again interrupted her narrative. "But as I've said before, it's the devil's own children they were. No less they wanted for their gold than the souls of the unfortunates unfortunate enough to come to them.

"A pretty kettle of fish it was for the

poor people to be up against. Not one of them but had starving children and those that hadn't already buried 'the wife' had her to think of, too. With the gold, they could buy what little food there was to be had. Without it they had nothing. *Och,* 'twas a sorry day for Ireland, the day it happened and none so sorry as those who sold themselves. For sell themselves, they did, lock, stock and barrel to the devil."

Tears welled in my young eyes, believing implicitly, as I did, every word I heard. The old woman, noticing my grief, leaned towards me and placing her gnarled hands on my shoulders, endeavored to sooth me:

"*Whisth,* don't cry, *alanna.* God's ways are strange ways as you'll find out as I go along.

"It wasn't more than a matter of hours," she went on, picking up the thread of her story, "before the Countess Kathleen heard tell of the terrible misfortune

descended on the place. Straight as the crow flies, she made her way to Mary Walshe and bade her gather the people from far and near to hear her word, which thing, Mary, let it be to her credit, did.

"When everyone was gathered, the noble Countess had her say with them.

"'My darling people,' she says, as simple as you please, 'sorry, I am, to hear the word I hear this day. Sorry, I am, you sell yourselves for gold and the punishments—the flaming punishments—of Hell. Sorry, I am, I did not get the word sooner that the evil might have been skirted entirely. But I am here now and we can but trust in God, and it's not too late. All my jewels, all my treasures have I sold for gold that you may neither thirst nor hunger, that you may renounce the devil and all his works and pomps.'

"It's little need I have to be telling you," the old woman smiled, "a great cheer went up into the skies, and traveled all

the way to Slievenamon, so loud it was, for the brave and generous woman.

"But the devil is ever a 'tricky the loop.' When the two *spalpeens* first got word of what was afoot, they were as mad as a farmer with cattle at the cross roads on a fair morning—fit to be tied they were.

"Soon enough, however, the anger died in them and they put their two heads together and hatched out a plot that left them smirking, so evil it was.

"The Countess Kathleen, unaware of their scheming, went right ahead, true to her word, tending the wants of the poor, seeing they had their fill, each and every one of them, and they, God help them, knelt on the hard ground and blessed her for a saint.

"For two whole days she gave. But on the morning of the third day, going to her treasure chest, she found it empty, which was strange since it had been full and more, the night before.

"Begor, it's great distress, she was in entirely. Cried down tears, she did, and rent her silken tresses, because it's right well she knew the devil's messengers had stolen it.

"Meanwhile, word of the country's plight was noised abroad and a ship load of provisions from one of them foreign countries was on the high seas. It was said, at the time, by those having knowledge of such things—seafaring men and the like—that it would be eight days before it reached the shores of Ireland.

"Eight days, you might be after thinking, is only a drop in the bucket of time, but if you had to starve that long you'd sing a different song, my fine people," the old woman murmured impressively, as if she, herself, had known such terrible privation, causing Cousin Mary to ejaculate: "God save us all from such evil!"

"Begorra," the old woman made known, "you haven't heard the half of it yet.

"On the next morning, after spending the night in prayer, the good Countess dressed herself, modestly as was her wont, and set out to have a 'confab' with the evil ones.

" 'Good morrow to you, kind and gracious lady!' says they, foxy as you like, the minute they laid eyes on her.

" 'It is not wishing you the time of day I would be,' answered the Countess to their salutation.

" 'What, then, do you want from us since we are not worthy of your Good morrow?' they asked, not at all pleased at her haugty way with them.

" 'Buying souls for Satan is your mission to our sad country, is it not?' said Kathleen without any beating about the bush.

" 'Since the honored Countess puts it that way, we have but one answer to make and that is: yes!' said they.

"Faith, up spoke my brave Kathleen,

telling them she would sell them her soul but at a costly price.

" 'How much?' shouted the evil ones, for truth to tell they had been sent specially to rob the Countess of her right to Heaven, she being of such high virtue, she turned bad into good wherever she happened to set foot.

"Then Kathleen—God love her!—drew a bag from the folds of her dress: 'Fill this with gold,' she commanded, 'and my soul is yours.'

" 'Done,' they agreed and for an hour and more they poured their precious metal into the bag until, at last, it was filled to the brim.

" 'The bargain is sealed,' said the evil ones, holding out their hands to shake on it.

" 'It's not joining hands with you yet a while, I'll be.' Kathleen denied them and calling to her servants who were without, she departed.

"When she got home, she distributed the gold equally among all, asking them to use it sparingly until the provisions came from abroad.

"Afterwards, she locked herself in her room, giving orders she was not to be disturbed by living mortal.

"Three days went by—three weary days —without the Countess making any sign. At last, the worrying grew great among the people and they, after knocking loudly and getting no answer, broke down the door.

"God help us all in our time of need, but it is stone dead they found her and she with a smile of great peace on her beautiful face.

"There was, you may be sure, great mourning all over the land and the keening at her funeral was the loudest ever heard in all Ireland and her funeral the biggest ever seen for that matter."

At that point, I remember vividly,

shouting, "But did God forgive the Countess for selling her soùl to the devil, old woman?"

"What a question you ask," the old woman grumbled angrily. "Of course He forgave her. She is a saint in Heaven this day, you can take my word for it for the Church hasn't got around to cannonizing her as yet."

"What ever happened to the evil one?" Bobby wanted to know.

"*Arra,* them were the boys, were they not?" the old woman shook her head over them. "I'll tell you what happened them and didn't they deserve it richly—there's a river down Cork way known by the name Blackwater and it's many a time in my rambles I've stopped off to look in its waters and see on the bottom none other than those same two *spalpeens.* They must, for God had ordained it so, stay there until The Last Day as a punishment."

"A finer story has never been told under this roof," Uncle Eddy complimented the old woman on her skill.

"I have *the gift,*" asknowledged the old woman simply.

"You'll have a cup of tea now," suggested Aunt Mary.

"I will, *a vourneen deelish,* I'll have a cup of tea now."

"Thank you for your story, old woman," Bobby and I chorused, since she had told it specially for us.

A few moments later the clinking of cups against saucers filled the kitchen.

CHAPTER TEN

WATERPARK

When Bobby and I returned to Tramore, we found Mother completely recovered from her illness. We also found that Sir Stork had been busy in our absence, presenting us with a calf, two colts, a filly, three Kerry Blue puppies, thirteen bonhams, four kittens and a baby whom Mother introduced as our new brother John, much to our disgust.

Friends from far and near came to see the baby and drink his health, ignoring completely the newly born animals that Bobby and I considered vastly superior to our new brother.

The local newspaper carried a paragraph, quoting Father as having said John was a second Jack Dempsey. This riled

me considerably because, when I was born, Father said the same thing except that it was of Jack Johnson he said it.

But it was not untill Mother's numerous lady friends started pinching our noses and saying, "Oh, Bobby and Alan, the new baby has put your noses out of joint," that we rebelled and plotted to dispose of the new baby by giving him to the first travelling tinker man who came down the road.

The plot, however, was nipped in the bud by Father's decision that it was high time we resumed our studies so rudely interrupted by the closing of Mount Saint Benedict.

Our new school was in Waterford City and was known as Waterpark.

I have often wondered why it was called Waterpark. Perhaps it was because it was bounded on one side by a public park and on the other side by the steel-grey waters of the River Suir.

The school was run by Christian Brothers, who cured their pupils of insubordination with a leather strap, carried on their shoulders under their soutanes, when not in use, which was seldom.

There was a rumor in circulation at Waterpark, that the placing of a hair from a horse's tail across the palm of the hand when receiving a "bang," or slap, would result in the leather strap splitting its stitches and breaking in two pieces. Now that I remember it, the rumor was also current at Mount Saint Benedict but there corporal punishment was rarely, if ever, administered to the hands, making it impractical to attempt to prove the rumor, and, although it did loom practical at Waterpark, no boy to my knowledge ever tried it. To this day, I regret not having done so. I might have won the esteem and veneration of future generations of schoolboys had the attempt proved successful.

The school building at Waterpark was a red, wooden bungalow. Its floors, which always looked as if someone, at some time or other, had sprinkled them generously with coal dust, were not immune to the moods of the River Suir, suggesting yet another reason for the name Waterpark and, come to think on it, the school colors, black and red, may have been borrowed from the color of the building and the color of its floors.

We travelled by train to and from school and I do believe those twenty minute journeys to be the happiest journeys of my life.

The morning ride was dedicated to homework that should have been done the night before but never was; the evening ride to what Pat Madigan, the train guard, referred to as "blackguarding."

Had a stranger looked into the carriage we occupied on those morning rides, he would have fancied it a travelling school

and his eyes would have sought out the absent schoolmaster.

Had the stranger lingered, he would have witnessed strange happenings, indeed.

He would have seen Paddy Walshe exchanging his solved algebra problems—Paddy was a wizard at algebra—for a verbal résumé of a history lesson, with John Christopher Cusack, called "J. C." for short. He would have seen Paddy Power and his brother Redmond Power waging a battle royal as to which of them had repeated the Greek alphabet correctly. He would have seen Alan Buck, shamelessly tracing a map to be presented in Geography class later in the day as having been drawn free hand and without the aid of an atlas. He would have seen Joe Walsh and Bobby Buck, together, rendering Virgil passably different from the translation in their possession. And, as the train neared its destination, he would

have seen every boy dash towards Paudeen Murphy who had just completed his Gaelic lesson. He would have heard Paudeen's futile words of protest, "Why should I give it you? Why don't you do your own lessons?" He would have seen Paudeen cast to the floor, his copybook taken from him and its contents carefully noted and written down in our copybooks.

When we entered our classroom every morning, it was customary for the Brother in charge to deliver a scathing oration about the "laggardly Tramore boys."

We, you see, owing to there being no earlier train, arrived one full hour after classes had commenced. It would, however, be unjust if I allowed you to think it was because of the train service, over which we had no control, the scathing oration was delivered. No, it was because the train left Tramore at nine o'clock, arriving in Waterford at twenty minutes past the hour and we, "the laggardly

Tramore boys," spent forty minutes walking the quarter of a mile between station and school.

We maintained, stoutly, you may be sure, that it was physically impossible for us to traverse the distance in less time.

One day, however, a boy of the master's pet variety, gave us away completely by covering the distance in ten minutes flat.

Well do I remember the fate meted out to the unfortunate wretch that afternoon on the return journey to Tramore, but fearing to have my race dubbed barbarian, I shall but tell you that we threw his cap out of the window, passing the Metal Bridge, so that, on reaching Tramore, he had to walk the tracks for a mile to retrieve it. And, lest you misjudge the spirit of the Irish, let me assure you that we continued to use forty minutes of time to reach Waterpark from the station. Had we acknowledged defeat in the mat-

ter, we would never have memorized our Shakespeare as thoroughly as we did, for it was on those walks, we memorized the passages set for us by our English teacher.

Picture a group of schoolboys, books in hand, strolling by the muddy banks of a slow flowing tributary river, memorizing Mark Anthony's famous oration in this terrible fashion—

Friends, Romans, Countrymen,
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears.

Add to the picture a daub of thick, south of Ireland brogue and you will have a portrait of the manner in which we murdered Shakespeare every morning.

Yet, when it came to casting for a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* it was, at least, two of the Tra-

more laggards who were alloted important roles. Joe Walshe played Titania as she had never been played before; a pair of water wings, that had to be inflated between acts, tied across his chest. Alan Buck played Puck, thereby giving the Brothers a glorious revenge, for when he mouthed the line: "I'll put a girdle 'round the earth in forty minutes," they, out in front, whispered audibly: "You ought to girdle the distance between station and school in less time, at that rate."

There was a lay teacher at Waterpark whom I shall always, kindly, remember. Johnny Dyan was his name, dignified somewhat by the letters, M.A., that followed after it. Johnny was an elderly man. What little hair remained to him was white. He was short in stature but solid as a rock. In his young days he had, besides his brilliant scholastic reputation, a reputation as a football player. Indeed,

he had won his "cap," playing for Ireland against foreign invaders on several occasions. Johnny's eyes were brown saucers that exuded rays of fear and penetrated to the very marrow of his pupils. He chewed tobacco in class, and in such a manner that his lips were always wet, and sneering and a slow dribble of tobacco juice nearly always marred his chin.

He taught us History and those eyes of his were capable of picking out, no matter how skillfully hidden, any boy, who under cover of his desk, carried a history book on his knee.

His method of punishing such culprits was, I believe, unique. He would order them clear of their desks to the "line," or open floor beside the desks. There, he would keep them standing in terrified suspense for five or ten minutes. Then, very much as a cat stalking a bird, he would come on them, his eyes blazing, his tobacco stained lips caught between his

teeth and, with his knuckles, rendered more pain giving by his clenched fist, rap them sharply on their unprotected heads. If a culprit cringed, Johnny would stand there until he straightened himself up and in such cases an additional rap was administered, covering the crime of cowardice. The raps, as I very well know, often induced headaches of an hour's duration.

Yet, withal, Johnny Dyan, M.A., is the teacher I respect above all others of my schooldays. Perhaps, if I did not appreciate him then, I can now make amends by doffing my hat, and keeping my head out of reach of his knuckles, bow before his great knowledge and superior wisdom.

Although Bobby and I began our schooldays together, he ended them before I did, choosing to be apprenticed to a firm of electrical engineers in Waterford City.

We missed being together but, being

brothers, and not given overmuch to indulging our emotions, we did not speak of the sorrow our parting caused us.

One year later, I said good-bye to Waterpark, realizing that I, too, was growing up and that it was time I turned my thoughts to earning a living.

We do not, unfortunately, have in Ireland the opportunities to go through college that American boys have and those of us whose parents cannot bear the heavy expense involved, must, early in life, look for an occupation.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FAILURE AND FAREWELL

It was settled. I had seemingly decided my fate. I had decided to become a wireless operator.

The glowing picture, painted with words by my father, of a uniform adorned with gold braid, decided me. All that I had to do to gain the privilege of wearing this uniform was to go to Dublin, attend there the Atlantic Radio College, study hard for nine months, pass my examination and then ask my father to buy it for me.

I arrived in Dublin on a winter's night. The air, what there was of it, was taken up with thick fog, colored yellow by flickering gas lamps and with the vile odor of the River Liffey.

I hired a hansom and proceeded over the wet and slippery cobbled streets to Rane's Hotel in Gardiner Square on the north side of the city.

Rane's Hotel, in those days, was a boarding house, glorified like so many of its kind with the name hotel.

At Rane's, everybody sat down to meals at the same time and at the same table—there was only one table. If you were absent at meal time, you did not eat.

Mrs. Rane looked like a madonna. She did the cooking and the meals were served by her sister, Miss Kaven, who did not look like a madonna but prayed each night before the image of one that she might find a husband before she withered. I put her in touch with the Metal Man.

When I entered the sitting room at Rane's that first night, I saw several young men pouring over weighty looking tomes. They proved themselves fellow students and, as soon as I had made myself known,

they cast aside their books and, from under a divan, dragged a radio set, a radio that I later learned was the property of Mrs. Rane who fondly supposed it doing duty in the matter of entertainment on the heavy mahogany sideboard, its customary resting place.

It was a six tube, battery set and my fellow students had turned it into a transmitter, using a key and buzzer to transit messages in Morse Code to other students located in other hotels throughout the city. The messages sent and received were not devoid of humor, judging from the hilarious laughter that filled the room.

How long this would have continued had there not been a knock on the hall door, I do not know. Mrs. Rane answered the knock. We heard her voice raised in protest and a moment later just as the radio set disappeared under the divan, two men, obviously detectives, burst into the room:

"Which of ye is transmitting without a license?" the taller of the two demanded roughly.

A boy, whom I came to know as Michael Dwan, answered for all:

"Transmitting what?" His intonation was of curiosity rather than guilt.

"There's not a bit of use beating about the bush. We traced it to this house. Who done it? Who done it? That's what we want to know and that's what we're here to find out."

"Maybe you'll have the kindness to tell us when you find out, Mr. Detective man," Dwan unperturbed by the brashness of the man replied.

"Where's the radio you spoke of?" The detective turned questioningly to Mrs. Rane.

Mrs. Rane's eyes turned to the sideboard and very nearly popped out with surprise: "It . . . it isn't there, officer," she confessed weakly.

"To be sure it's not there," intervened Dwan. "'Twas making a noise last night as if it were in touch with the infernal regions, so, this afternoon I took it to the repair man."

"You had no business . . ." Mrs. Rane cut her words short, as one suddenly stricken dumb. She had seen Dwan's lowered eyelid.

"Let's look over the house, John," suggested the talkative to the silent detective.

Upstairs they went, taking Mrs. Rane with them. Dwan waited until their footsteps had died away into the higher region. Then he reached for the set and calmly commenced transmitting as if nothing untoward had happened.

The disgruntled detectives left without solving the mystery.

I have no doubt that it was this same Dwan who fixed my bed that night so that when I hopped into it, it collapsed on the floor.

Such was my introduction to Rane's hotel.

There is an old ballad my mother used to sing that has in it the spirit of Dublin and for that reason and because I frankly own my own inability to provide a better picture, I give you now the words of *Molly Malone.*

In Dublin's fair city,
Where the girls are so pretty,
There lives a sweet girl called Molly Malone.
She wheels her wheel-barrow
Through streets broad and narrow,
Crying: "Cockles and mussels, alive, alive-o!"

She was a fishmonger,
And sure 'tis no wonder,
For so were her mother and father afore her.
She died of the fever
And no one could save her,
Crying: "Cockles and mussels, alive, alive-o!"

While admitting I never saw a cockle girl in Dublin, I maintain that the ballad

has captured the spirit of the city. It gives a picture of the streets without the tedious process of naming them. It tells something of the nature of the people and it is not devoid of Dublin humor, as you can very well see. Perhaps it has one fault. It does not take into account the fighting spirit of the people and what, say I, would any Irishman be without a fighting spirit? Nothing, less than nothing!

It is for me, then, to inject a wee bit of a fight, to balance the budget and when I recall the lump the size of a duck's egg raised on my head by a policeman's batten on Armistice Day, 1927, outside the Gresham Hotel, the task looms comparatively easy.

Whether school was closed that day or not, I do not remember. If it was closed, I had an easy conscience; if it was not, I was guilty of truancy.

It had been whispered for days before

that the Irish Republicans would endeavor to break up the parade of Irish soldiers who had fought on the side of England in the Great War. It had also been whispered that anyone wearing a Flanders Poppy had better remain indoors.

Outside and in front of the Gresham Hotel, a platform had been erected that the speechmakers might voice their sympathy with what somebody has termed "the fallen dead."

I arrived on the scene in time to see a parade of ex-soldiers come marching down O'Connell Street to the sound of martial music. They halted before the platform. A motor car drew up and from its upholstered depths, stepped the speechmakers. An ominous tension filled the air. The first of the speechmakers stepped onto the platform but he never uttered a word. A corps of Republicans dashed suddenly from a side street, hurling tear gas into the midst of the as-

sembled multitude. To add to the general confusion, the day being foggy, fog signals had been placed on the tram car tracks and, as the trams passed by, the signals exploded giving the impression of guns being fired. Soldiers, populace and speechmakers fled for their lives in all directions and as they did so a contingent of police arrived on the scene and charged after them with battens, believing them to be Republicans.

I, as I have already mentioned, was one of their targets.

My term of nine months being ended, I returned to Tramore to await the result of my examination.

There was no doubt in my mind as to the result but, considerate of others as I have always tried to be, I postponed telling Mother and Dad until it became necessary to do so.

I confess now, that the only thing that

appealed to me about the calling of a wireless operator was the uniform. I did learn to send and receive morse code at twenty five words a minute, but I was a hopeless failure when it came to understanding the theoretical side of electricity. Ohms law and Faradays law although I attended lectures on them both at Trinity University, are still as great a mystery to me as they were then.

When the results were published my failure was uncovered. I had, I blush to confess, received a "duck egg"—no marks at all—for theory.

The atmosphere at home following the tidings was much the atmosphere outside the Gresham Hotel on Armistice Day—tense.

Mother soon smothered her feelings of disappointment but Father was not so easily won over. His pride was wounded. I had failed and my failure was on the lips of the two thousand souls that make

up the town of Tramore and, to make matters worse, another Tramore boy, who had been attending a wireless school in Wales, passed his examination with flying colors.

Ah me, what tragic days!

Father finally softened and asked me if I would care to try again. I thanked him but refused. It would have been useless.

"What will you do then?" he asked me, not unkindly. "There is so little a boy can do in Ireland."

"I could go to America," I suggested thoughtfully.

"What would you do in America?"

"America is a young country, Father. I would find something to do; something that has a future."

"Think it over, boy, and don't say anything to your mother until you have made up your mind."

Once again I sat in a Cork bound train. Once again, I beheld the emerald green fields, the whitewashed cottages with their yellow thatched roofs of straw and stone chimneys pouring forth delicate blue, transparent turf smoke. Once again I laid eyes on Lismore Castle and the silver ribbon at its feet that is the River Blackwater. Once again I passed through Cork, the diamond in the unclean setting. But there was no joy in them for me. My ticket was a single ticket.

As I boarded the liner for America, I turned and looked back at the land and in that fleeting moment I knew the pain of a broken heart.

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